

# 人類は衰退しました

9

田中 口三才

イラスト／戸部 淑





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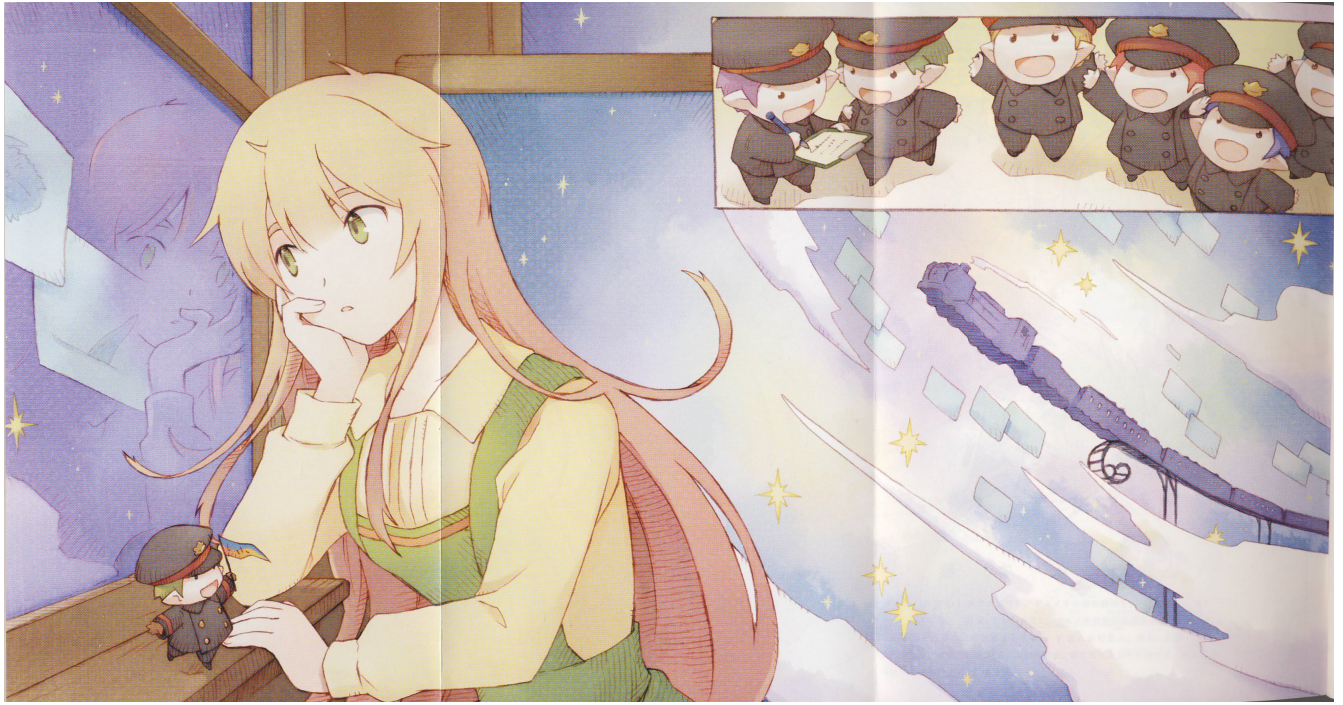
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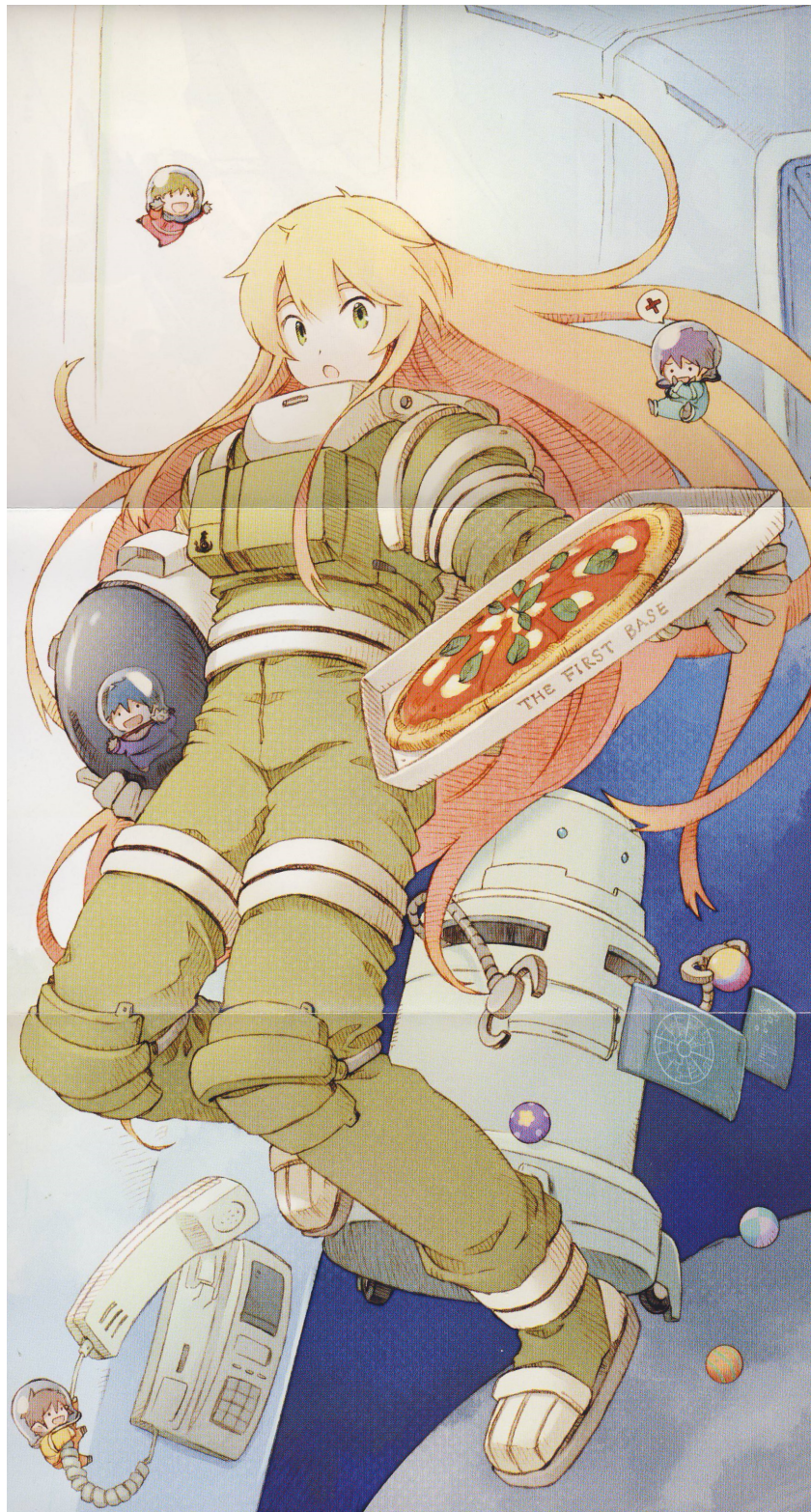
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# 人類は衰退しました

9



## MAIN CHARACTERS 主 要 キ ャ ラ ク タ ー

**Protagonist (Watashi, "I")** Narrator of the story. Mediator of Kusunoki Village. **Fairies** at present, the people who count as humanity on this Earth. **Grandfather** Protagonist's grandfather. Boss of the Office of Mediation in Kusunoki Village.

**Assistant-san** a youth who works as assistant to the Office of Mediation in Kusunoki Village, **Curly Hair** A girl who went to the same school as the Protagonist. She's attached the older girl and calls her 'onee-san'. **PocMon** a walking memory device equipped with an AI.



*From the back cover:*

### **Humanity Has Declined 9**

Humanity has met with a gradual decline, and for some centuries now. Earth was now the property of the Fairies. Acting as intermediary between said fairies and humans were the international public servants known as Mediators, which was my job. A notification of death (of sorts) had come from my Grandfather, who was still on the moon and out of contact, so I was determined to go to the moon to find him. And that is where the fairies gave me a free pass with "now  $\longleftrightarrow$  the beginning / no limits" written on it. I rode on a steam locomotive where the evolution of humanity streaked across the train's window, but was the end of the voyage that I reached a dream? Or maybe... the conclusion at last?!?!



妖精さんたちの、ちきゅう’  
The Fairies and Their Earth’



The man was about in his fifties, as far as age, and he was wearing the very rough clothes that were a Hawaiian shirt and cargo pants, and for some reason he was lying on the beach chair with the dead eyes of a fish.

The beach was a white, shining thing that had, of course, no tourists.

A sea brimming with a deep and pale blue laid before our eyes.

The air was the warm one of the southern countries.

Although he was in an environment that was joy of life packed in a tight cluster, the man, for some reason, was struck dumb.

His mouth hung half-open.

It was evident that he had had a shocking experience shortly before.

But I did not care about any of that.

With a thump I thrust the shotgun's muzzle at the man's forehead.

"oWah, what is it? What, a gun? What are you doing?!"

"You are the originator of the Moon Travel Project."

"S-, so I am... who did you just say?"

"You are the one who branded its participants as 'aristocrats'."

".....what?"

"I am going to have you tell me everything and in detail. If you do not..."

The nihilistic threat had him turn white, staring at the muzzle of the gun.

"H-, how are you on this island? This is supposed to be my private property..."

I wordlessly pointed at thumb to my own back.

Seeing what had landed there, the older man looked astonished.

"...I'm seeing something that looks like a helicopter made of cardboard. Am I dreaming?"

"It is a little bit magical, but it is reality."

"That's what dreams are usually called, though..."

Said cardboard helicopter was presently under repairs by fairy mechanics (because we had crashed).

"Osprey!" "What span?" "I guess about seventeen meters?" "Total height?" "How about six meters?" "It's got tilt rotor functionality, what do you say to that?" "We accept that it's a rubber band shaft!" "Maximum of max output is five thousand!" "Range of flight is up to you!"

"Successfully integrates a K6 Cardboard Box!" "What's the main equipment?" "A sweets ray!"

"A candy spreader!" "Et cetera et cetera!"

"Whew, I thought I was gonna die..."

That was when Y came clattering out of the wreckage at a crawl.

She had committed a piloting error right before the landing. I had promptly escaped when we were fifteen meters above the ground (I did a roll so I was unhurt).

"I do not like talking without a point. So start explaining to me the current status of the Project in detail."

I urged the man while thrusting the shotgun at him.

The old man made a clanking sound as he drew a pistol from behind his back. He wanted to go against me.

I remained calm and fired the shotgun. The pistol disappeared from his hand and flew off behind him.

"T-, this is insane... you have a shotgun, but you shot off only the pistol?"

There was not a single injury on the man's body. Well, it was expectable, since I was skilled.

"I hit your pistol with a single pellet out of the scattered shot."

"Nothing so idiotic would ever happen, normally!"



"It is possible to me. If you are obedient and talk I will not inflict any injury on you. Now go on."  
"...fine. I'll talk."  
The man hung his head in disappointment.  
"Seeing her use a gun with that skill... it's like she's someone else..."  
I heard Y's quivering voice behind my back.

According to the old man's explanation, first of all, this island near the Equator that we were on had no name, and it was a private island which he had inherited from his ancestors. He said that, since the catapult that served as launch platform for the shuttle was offshore, this island was being used as base of operations. He said that he had inherited never-expiring cans of food, ones such that a descendant of aristocrats like him would find no problem in eating for his whole life, so he could pour himself entirely into his scientific hobbies and freely sate his overflowing intellectual curiosity. At the end of all that came the discovery of a massive floating catapult and unimpeded space travel. There ought be limits to how much one gets in a single value set. "Better yet, all of them were quickly repairable and seemed usable. We also acquired fuel, and a friend of mine supplied a fully automated workshop..." "And then you sent a letter to the most famous scientists and engineers of the whole country." "Right. In the end, we gathered several dozen cooperators..." He then said that the Project was proceeding at an increasing pace. And then that the shuttle had already been launched. "An amazing success. That's no mistake." "And why are you saying that? It may have exploded partway through, you know." "We had a signal. We confirmed that they landed around the equator of the moon. However..." "However?" "Right after that, the signal cut off..." The man grasped his head. "Enough of this already. Hand over the documentation for the Project." "W-, what are you going to do with it? You're just an amateur, you can't..." "There is no need for you to know that." "F-, fine, I get it. I'll bring 'em. The Command Center is over there. Come with me... but still..." "What is it?" "...those're... some eyebrows..." "....."

"The helicopter is fixed, at least, and they gave the elastics over five thousand turns." My not-always-wanted but inseparable colleague Y said that with a hand on the stick. "There are two engines. And there has been no mistakes made with either, correct?" "Both of them were given the five-thousand turn... so, no good?" "...guilty!" Glared at, Y made a meek smile. "Both of 'em require ten thousand turns. But the sun's gonna set, you know." "Suits me just fine. The investigation over here will take until night." Y spoke with a submissive look on her face. "So, supposing we find what location exactly did the bosses here targeted, how're we getting all the way to the moon?"

"....."

"I knew it, there's nothing we can do. Even your fairies would say that outer space's a little too far, right?"

"That being said, as there is a possibility that they survived, we cannot abandon them."

"PocMon's data collection finished a while ago. Please let her rest for the time being."

PocMon was the unimaginable by-product of the People Monument Project, a portable terminal in the form of a monolith, and right now she was straight in the middle of data surfing in a container house, which was the control center, if in name only.

"Sigh. If I knew it had gotten like this, I wish I'd packed dinner. Food with any ingredient beside sweets, that is."

I tossed a purse filled to the brim with canned foodstuff to Y.

"These are eternal tin cans I obtained containing beef steak. We can make do with that as dinner."

"Ohdear, these are luxury goods!"

She revolved back to happiness.

We looked up at the sky above this sandy beach over which the sun was declining.

Up in it, we found a moon that felt like an illusion, one that was waning slightly differently than how we would see it in our hometown.

Grandfather was still alive.

That certainty pierced through me and made me act.

Warming the canned food was good enough.

We had a boiling and freshly harvested hot beef steak (of synthetic meat. Main ingredient: cactus) wound round, and as we spread it on a plate, I found Y staring intently at my face.

"Still..."

"What is it?"

"Your eyebrows. Aren't they too thick?"

"What is it about my brows?"

Human eyebrows did not grow thick all of a sudden. However, when people gained a spirit like that of a tough assassin whose strong will had been unleashed, it was not impossible they would be seen like that.

Now then, let us rewind time a little. I will briefly summarize the events that led us here. The proverbial three lines will be enough as opening.

① Grandfather had set out on a voyage to the world of the moon.

② The problems imposed on the Village had been somehow resolved.

③ I received something like a notification of death, which startled me.

The text of that letter went like this.

*"...as for the currently undergoing retry of the moon Travel Project, specifically the matter of the loss of contact with the shuttle partway through, we have long been working hard to resume contact, but on the Xth of ○ it was decided that the project would be canceled. We have no words to apologize to you aristocrats on the matter, furthermore..."*

As an aristocrat (and it was not settled that I was one) I could of course not accept this.

After that terrifying notification was brought to me, I started jotting down a letter of further inquiry.

However, in the few weeks it took for the letter to arrive to its recipient and for a reply to come



back...

The surviving elderly man could have died as well.

"....."

I tore up the letter, picked up a pinch of something inside a bottle on the shelves, and put it to my lips. When I blew into it, a sharp 'piii!' of a sound could be heard.

It was a whistle candy (pineapple flavor).

When tilted sideways, the cut-up pineapple had a hole, and it could be used as a whistle.

I had invented it, I even applied for a patent. As long as no one in the past had a similar patent, and wealth aside, the honor was going to have been all mine.

"Pine-A!" "Pine-app!" "We came!"

Hearing the sound made by the candy, the fairies gathered around.

I made my request to them.

"Grandfather is in trouble, so I would like to go into space, if possible."

Yes, that was correct. I requested them the easiest measure to solve this with.

At present, human power-only efforts were not in fashion.

The fairies made a ring and began talking to each other, and eventually one of them, as representative, walked forwards.

"As long as you give us time..."

Quite the rare reply.

"Time, you say... is this a difficult wish?"

"Well, in space, there are no humans..."

So's that the problem?

I could not rely on the fairies. That fact was much heavier than I thought, and it pressed hard on my heart.

"...w-, what do I do..."

Which all meant that the fact was a fact that I had no choice but deal with this by myself.

Space was space.

I headed for the Office's library.

It was stocked to the brim with documents. There was a vast wealth of things related to space.

The one that I found first was...

"...hummm."

What I understood was that going to space was completely ludicrous, nothing else.

But the size of space, for one, the harshness of black holes, for another, or the absence of air, as well, were all inconsequential.

What I needed was a summary description of a way to get to the moon and back.

"I heard about the boss."

In the evening, everybody came to extend their condolences.

Y, K-san, Grandfather's friends, older men and ladies from the neighborhood, the mayor, and Curly Hair in a traveling outfit... wait, Curly Hair?

It seemed that the rumor had made every possible round in less than half a day.

"I would like to extend our condolences in the name of the Kusunoki Cannon Club."

This was a game friend of Grandfather's.

"Wait, before the condolences, wait for us to talk..."

"Onee-san! Onee-san, onee-san, onee-san!"



It was Curly Hair.

"Why are you here!"

She had a travel bag with her. She had probably just arrived.

"Sob sob sob! Sniff sniff sniff!"

"K-san, you are much too early with the tears..."

This was a problem, things were proceeding as if his death was a certainty.

"What're you gonna do? With the funeral's date, for one thing. I'll help you with anything," went Y.

"No, I mean, he is still not dead, they just decided to end the search, I do mean it."

Everyone there looked at me with moistened eyes brimming with sympathy.

"...I know how you don't wish to accept this. Still, you gotta accept reality and all that."

"Come on now!"

The probability was high that Grandfather still lived. If we go help him right away, then we might make it in time. It was for that goal that I searched for ways to reach the moon quickly. I spoke of that to them.

"...ahhh..."

They all made odd faces.

Whoops, this only appeared as the deranged behavior of one who had lost a flesh and blood relative.

"Wait just a sec," went Y.

The people whispered to each other a little further away.

I saw this already, indeed, this scene here...

"Got it. You should search until you're satisfied. We'll leave talk of funerals later, 'right."

Y, who had come back, proclaimed that with eyes of pity. That angered me.

Regardless, we got official approval(?), so the search could begin.

"Ma'am, what are you going to perpetrate next?," asked PocMon.

I borrowed Omnipotent Portable Terminal PocMon from K-san.

If I was to search for documents, she was needed.



PocMon was something of a memento of the People Monument Project. She was nothing more than a mobile monolith ten centimeters tall, yet even now she was wirelessly connected to her massive central body.

And all gatherable data about human history had been tossed within that central body.

However, the volume of that data was so excessive that accessibility was zero. There were many who said that the data ought be sorted, however the Project reached its end with that still under postponement.

"Please do not speak like I 'perpetrate' things every time. A search, if you please."

"Fine. What do you want to search for?"

"...ways to reach the moon."

An electronic 'meep' sound rang out.

"Found it."

"What, you actually found it?"

I did not think it would be found so easily, I was startled.

PocMon's monolithic body turned into a liquid crystal display and showed these lines of text:

**[Way #1]**

Build a cannon 270 meters in length. Ride on that cannon and have someone shoot you to the moon.

To return, drop down from the moon and make a water landing with a parachute.

"...this is plain belittling space."

PocMon replied, "it's just the result of the search. It's not my conclusion at all. There was this in the data, that's all. I don't know about its veracity."

So I saw.

As the data had been gathered willy-nilly, fact and fiction had become intermingled.

It was just that, though I was a beginner in the matter of astronomy, I did understand how this would be foolhardy to attempt.

Next one, next one.

**[Way #2]**

Just travel there with a rocket.

"And if I could, this would not be a problem."

"This was the top-rated search item, but I thought the same as you and displaced it to second place. My consideration for you is sharp, isn't it?"

"Thank you very much, but that consideration was pointless..."

Regardless, a rocket.

Realistically speaking it would have been quick, of course, but since this matter was difficult even for the fairies, there were likely to be all sorts of invisible constraints involved.

They could not simply do as they always do, which was to make something out of cardboard and fling it off.

**[Way #3]**

Use the Enterprise... an US starship (22<sup>nd</sup> Century?)

"...what would that mean?"

US? Starship?

The data was fragmentary, so I could not grasp the whole context.

I did feel like there used to be a spaceship by that name, though, indeed...

"Why I don't understand, but there's correlated location information."

According to the map that PocMon's belly had become, that location was quite near.

It was at the Monolith Palace located right next to the Office of Mediation.

That was where the two search devices were held, or rather, where they lived.

V-kun and P-ko-san.

Although they had once been launched from the Earth, they found space had become disagreeable to them and came back. Whether to believe that or not depends on you.

"Then it is because they are fellow monoliths, am I correct?"

"Yeah, you are..."

I hurried down one level of stairs and headed to the front of the shrine.

I took off the Fairy Strap from PocMon and set it on the V-type monolith... which meant Voyager-kun, however...

...the fairy strap was actually a real-deal fairy.

He had been charging PocMon with electricity by rubbing a plastic desk pad on his head.

The fairy, completely still like it were a doll with closed eyes, woke up with a click.

"So hoooot! But so cooold!"

He then proceeded to not take out the desk pad, but to repeatedly and quickly take off and wear back his sweater, which made it crackle.



"Your method for providing electricity has changed, I see."

"This is much more sexy, you know?"

...was it, I wondered?

The fairy's supply of power was impressive, and in the blink of an eye the V-type monolith began clacking and morphing into the shape of a person.

"...hey there."

I had the feeling it had been quite a while since I last saw this face so like that of a masculine young man.

"The Enterprise, huh. I sort of remember, I guess."

With a sullen face he turned back towards his era.

"But I don't got anything formally recorded, and I don't got much in the way of memories."

"I see... can you at least tell me whether it was a ship or not?"

"It was a ship, no mistake. I just dunno what kinda ship it was. Just..."

"Just?"

"...hearing that name pisses me off."

"Did you know about it in the past?"

"I really dunno. You go look it up. Just, even if that Enterprise there existed for reals in the past, I don't think it still exists today, 's all."

"I see."

With our conversation finished, V-kun pointed at the Village and said this with humble eyes.

"...say, I got me a full tank of electricity here, mind if I go have some fun?"

Work pressured me even during the search.

At present the Office of Mediation was something of a hear-all consultation office, and commissions unrelated to our original job were brought up again and again.

"These days, rain hasn't been falling much, so my farm..."

"Understood."

It was in fact a request somewhat distant from our original job.

But no request from the residents of the Village was going to go unheard.

Were I to refuse them then it would be awkward when we passed by each other in the street...

"Fairies, could you make it rain just around this land?"

"Super easy, super easy!" "OK'oh?" "Like a big discharge?"

And then rain fell on Kusunoki, mainly on the cultivated areas.

"Ohhh, it started raining! This is a blessed rain! Sensei, thank you very much!"

"...solved easily once again."

By relying on the power of the fairies, even the more spiritual requests went like this. It was all easy.

"Are we out of requests?"

The work was so easy that the fairies had little motivation to do it.

A request with its objective pin-pointedly narrowed down was trivial, indeed.

"...which all means..."

"We don't have enough cardboard?" "Can we procure it?" "If we buy online we can get lots of it!" "But the cardboard for candies is too thin and no good!" "So it's gotta be the kind that comes with household appliances?"

The fairies were making something out of cardboard, basing themselves on the request I made of them.

And when their job was finished by let us say fifty percent...

"Heeey, whatcha doing!"

"Onee-saaan!"

Y and Curly Hair ran up the hill.

"Sooo, weren't you searching for ways to go to the moon? So what's this big thing here?"

"Onee-san, I was still unable to properly greet you..."

"This is a device that flies in the skies called a 'helicopter'. I am having the fairies replicate one."

"And what're you gonna do after you build that?"

"Onee-san! See, I haven't gotten even one millimeter taller since then, so..."



"It looks like I am going to need to fly around the world."

What I requested the fairies was a vehicle that would fly the skies.

It needed to fly long distances, carry plenty of baggage, and land anywhere... so went the order.

"...so you're saying this isn't going to go to the moon, right?"

"That is correct. This cannot fly wherever there is no air... but it can be used for other things."

"Onee-san! You know, I didn't make arrangements for lodging tonight, so... that is, well, uhm, should you want it, I could perhaps lodge at your house, if you would please let me..."

"You're not telling me you really mean chase after the Chief and fly off to some southern island?"

"Onee-san! I brought here a pillow! If I could exchange it for yours..."

"....."

"Ah! I get it now! You're going to some southern island to get a rocket."

"Onee-san! Are you aware that the smell on a pillow is a person's very best smell..."

"...being that needlessly sharp is a waste, indeed."

"Drop it, there's way too many problems with that."

"Onee-sa-"

"That cannot be determined unless tried."

"...there's no air on the moon. Did you know that?"

"Onee-sa-"

"I did. By the way, there is no ether either."

"This is different from your usual adventures, you clear on that?"

"Onee-sa-"

"That is precisely why I am starting earlier with making even the most daring of choices."

Y had fed-up eyes as she exhaled a long sigh.

"...you seriously mean to get there, huh."

"That is because I do not wish to lose my family for an idiotic reason such as that."

As we stood there in silent, facing each other, all that came between us was the gentle caress of the wind of early Summer.

"Onee-sa-"

There was a need for rapid action.

Main work aside, I had to pull together the necessary items, hand off the work to Assistant-san, and consult all but only the accurate documents.

The chopper itself was done in half a day. We performed a test flight.

The difficulty of control was at the level of a bicycle, so anyone could command it.

We took off without a hitch and made a loop of the Village, which Y, on the ground, looked up at with an awkward face.

"Say, how's about you drop this."

"There's things that just won't work, ever. Didn't you have to choose wisely 'n that stuff?"

"This is crazy, you don't even know if you'll just end up stranded somewhere on the moon!"

"I don't think that's what the boss would like..."

"Jus'drop it! All humans die someday!"

Every time I looked at Y's face she tried to discourage me... she was annoyingly persistent.

I was of course aware that there were definite problems.

However, at present I was a female leopard. A cheater.

I was not holding back on cheating in many ways... so cheetah, a cheater, fit me right, did it

not?

Well, all that aside.

"I have a dream!"

My speech made the rounds of the outdoors area where large crowds of fairies had gathered.

"I have a dream in which an ordinary Mediator can happily be in happiness and leisurely be at leisure!"

"I have a dream in which humans and fairies can enjoy being at the same table, surrounding sweets that I have made!"

"And most importantly, I have a dream in which I stand proud to bluntly dismiss the harshest and most troublesome of requests brought before me as being beyond my field of expertise!" I gained the cheers of the fairies.

"Wonderful!" "I'm in love!" "More words!" "Wonderful!" "Banzaai!" "Banzai for master human!"

The fairies were elated. They sounded like they could manage to do anything I asked them.

Good, because if we find that the rocket had broken down partway through, I will have to have them perform careful repairs. Nothing beat cheer before the act.

Y, Curly Hair, and Assistant-san watched that performance of mine at a distance with sharp gazes.

Everything was ready two days later.

It was still the dead of night, of course not a very good time slot to be in, but I was ready to leave at any moment.

"...therefore, we will leave as dawn breaks. Please make it spectacular when you take me to the moon, all right!"

"Yessah!" x lots

Several hundreds of fairies saluted as one. They were all wearing military uniforms from an older era, for some reason.

Was it because my seriousness reached them? In the stead of rifles they each shouldered a half of a disassembled pair of pliers. When it was time for work, a single team of two made one pair of pliers and used them. They were skilled at it.

All that aside, I had never had an adventure as scrupulously planned as this one.

I also had the fairies manufacture plenty of their own type of tools. With all of this we could get to the moon somehow... maybe? If not, it was going to be a problem, and a serious one.

I felt of course uneasy, but, still, I had to go.

A sharp light rose out of the summits of the mountains. It was dawn.

"About time to go, I suppose. So, everyone, climb aboard..."

It happened right then.

"No, stop it right there! The sortie is canceled!"

There came Y at the head of a group of people that had stepped into the house.

"W-, what are you doing here at this hour!"

"Well, as a result of deliberations, we came to the conclusion that you can't be allowed to disregard your work as Mediator to travel to the moon."

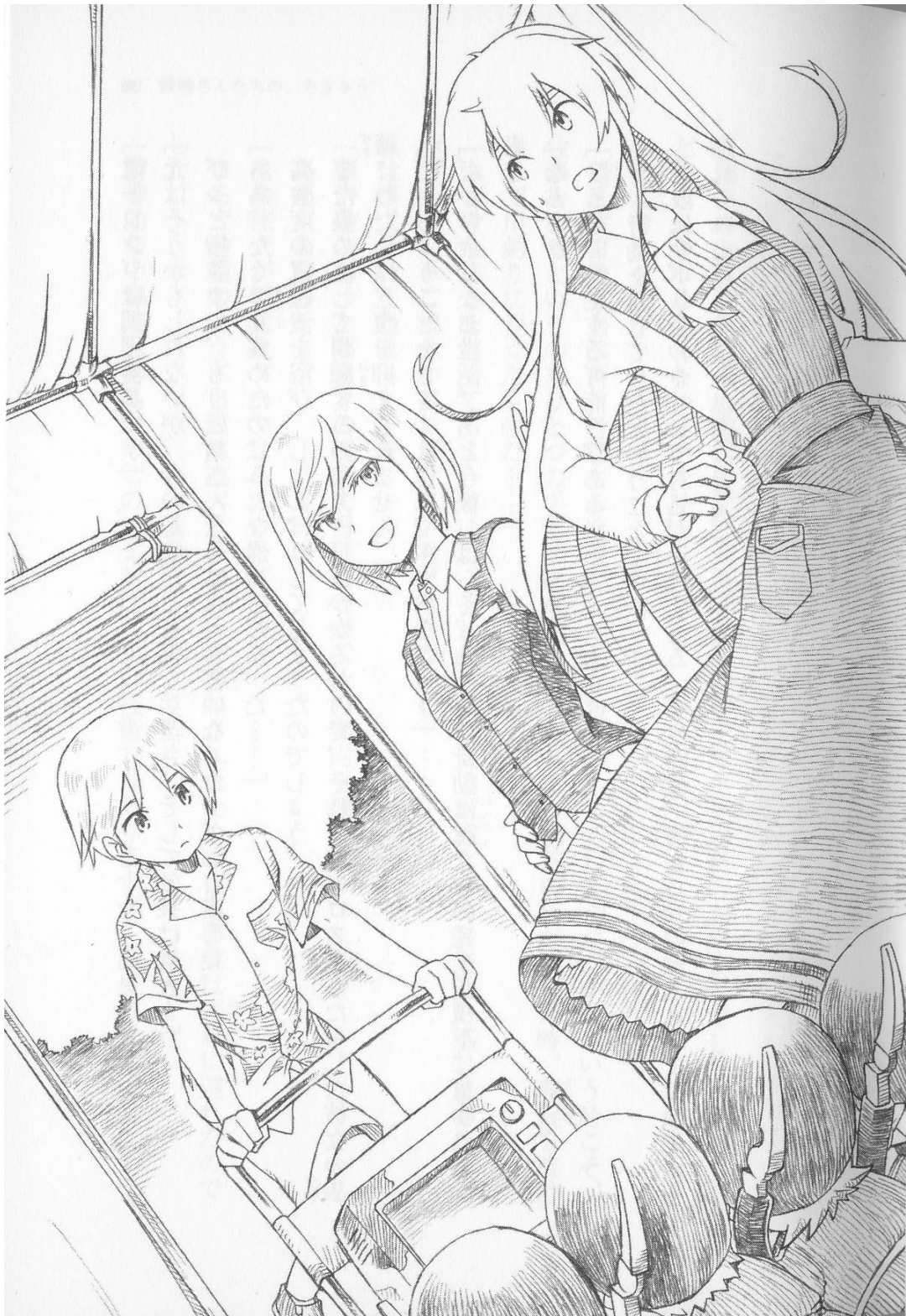
"Well now! For what reason are you saying something so heartless!"

"Because I'm sticking my head where it doesn't belong."

...she had asserted it without a single fragment of guilt, this human female had.

"In this all means, 'course, unprepared moon travels are prohibited, and travels to southern islands are canceled! By the way..."

Behind her back, Assistant-san was pushing a cart with a metal box on it.





The metal box was painted with camo patterns and connected with battery and cables installed on the bottom part of the cart.

"Move to the side a bit."

"What? Like this?"

Soon as I had slid over, the device was switched on. The metal box began emitting a low *bwooooh* of a sound.

There had been a door at the front of the box, but it had been removed, and the opening pointed towards the fairies. At ten seconds of time elapsed, there was a light *ding* sound and the device stopped.

This was, definitely, the cooking appliance known as microwave oven, which meant...

On the spot I returned my gaze to the fairies.

"....." x lots

They had all become expressionless.

"...do we leave?" "...it's dawn, do we sleep still?" "...do we take off our cosplay costume?"

"...we pulled another all-nighter..." "...I want to live normally." "...do we break rank?" "...we can make tomorrow be the big day..." "...feels like I wanna say g'bye to work..." "...there's no such thing as a good company that exploits its workers with unpaid overtime..."

"T-, the fairies seem to have become melancholic. It cannot be that the box...?"

"It's a microwave firing device. It was maybe a murder weapon in the far past, see. Using this it's possible to kill even those nasty lodgers next door. Ohhh so scary."

"Microwave ovens are for making food."

"Originally they might have been, but by today's standards this is a highly damaging weapon, see. And the effect is tremendous!"

Where she deftly pointed there were almost no more fairies at all.

"Awww, I had gathered so many, now they have all gone home..."

They all felt dejected when bathed in powerful microwaves.

Gathering them back and training them would have required a full day, and I could not fully restrain my anger towards her for causing this plight.

"Why are you doing this to me!"

"I told you, I'm sticking my head where it doesn't belong. Your behavior is under our complete supervision, understand."

"Why?"

"Because there's the possibility that you'll make a mess if you do this all alone."

...and that was why they were stopping me.

Her reaction had been much too fast for someone who normally skimps out on the job.

Regardless, back when she was in school, she was feared by underclassmen as a master of the prank.

As I stood, faltering, an unexpected figure showed up from behind her back. He had exaggerated and quite thick facial features.

"I heard about everything. I lost someone truly precious. I couldn't hold back the tears."

Making his appearance was the VIP Boss, the big shot of the UN that is said to have his job change every three days. Awww, seriously, this is getting more and more annoying...

"But he is not dead..."

"It's natural you'd be confused! Sadness makes a person go wrong at times. But it's precisely at those times that it's possible to get through by doing your job. When I was young, back when a second cousin I was very close to died, I too slipped out of the funeral to go river

fishing..."

He sounded like he was saying something that could not be taken seriously, but I could feel the concern. Or not, maybe he was simply saying something that was not to be taken seriously...?

"And, well, your business here...?"

"I wish to survey the dream world that the reports spoke of, and I would like you to act as guide."

Ahhh, that thing...

He meant the augmented reality dream that every household in the Village used to be obsessed with.

As it let people free to play in something of a sandbox, the recovery work had been as stalled as it could have been.

Being that it was psychological poison I wanted the technology left sealed, but the Boss' opinion was seemingly different.

"...understood. I will act as your guide."

"Huuuh, that's acquiescent of you."

"Guess so."

The reason was that it was easier to wait for another chance than to play runaway right now. Sense of duty aside, Y was not careless. Her hands were all too quick to slide inside my pocket and recover the Rounded-Up fairy I held hidden there.

"Ngh..."

"We've been together for long enough. I can read you."

I h-, had been disarmed. What was I to do now?

"When he was young, your grandfather also often ignored orders, so I suppose it's in your lineage."

"Did you know Grandfather when he was young?"

"...we only passed by each other several times. That being said, since I hadn't sated my appetite for the kind of success I now enjoy, we couldn't really get along."

"That is exactly how I thought it would be."

Politics-inclined men were maybe all like that.

"Now then, since even the Boss said that, I guess I'll have you obediently go get swamped in routine work."

Next to her, Assistant-san nodded twice.

...it did not appear likely that I could run away.

Since the dream world was at present locked away, guiding him there would not take long, but right then... I remembered something.

It may be possible to contact Grandfather while in the dream.

That had happened last time.

*"Truth is... we got some problem... can't come back home for a while."*

*"The shuttle... is damaged..."*

*"Right, the moon... the ruins... of moon's surface city..."*

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The worst possible situation had been averted, it could be said. But there was also the possibility that the exchange in itself had merely been a dream. It was just that Grandfather, well, he had this one fairy as a charm. Nothing that happened to him would be strange.

When I reached that conclusion I felt a little bit calmer.

"Understood. I will do my routine work. I will do my job."

"A wise decision, miss granddaughter."

"Then, sorry, but I need you to wear this."

What Assistant-san took out was a three-part set of household appliances, heated toilet seat / hair dryer / notebook PC.

"What do you want me to do?"

I hung the toilet seat at my neck like a necklace, holding the remaining two in my hands.



"These are anti-fairy electromagnetic items. We'll only have more problems if you call them back."

"...this is much too long a step to take. Also, this toilet seat, it was properly cleaned, was it...?"

The fairies did indeed have difficulties handling dodgy electromagnetic waves.

What could have brought her harassment of me to this point?

"Boss, with this we are perrfect!"

"I see. Then let's go investigating right away, how about! Onwards to whatever the secret technique is that allows the free manipulation of dreams!"

The Boss said that with eyes sparkling with desire.

And then we were once again the world of dreams.

The dose of Rakukko Picolin (the fairy-made sleeping drug) needed was supplied from the stock we had confiscated.

Previously, large crows of residents overstayed their presence there, however, now that it had been sealed away, the streets were deserted. There were no people, and no pink elephants walked about, either.

Though it was dark we could for some reason see far in the distance, and there spread a mysterious night scene of the Village.

"In short, the only thing to do here is sharing a dream."

"...this is a surprise. Mh? There's a gorgeous super-skyscraper over there, what is it?"

"That is your desire, mister Boss."

The building went up high into the sky and vanished into the clouds.



"A good thing, truly. What a magnificent sight. Just the way it should be..."

He seemed enraptured by it.

We others were all a bit repelled by it, however.

"So, there were signs that continued utilization caused dependence, weren't there?"

"Ahhh, that, you see, there were other environmental factors such as everybody being depressed, you see, so we only used it for very short periods of time."

Y knew more about this world, and could smoothly answer the Boss's questions.

I nonchalantly fell to last in the line and followed after them in deep silence.

I had definite memories of the shape of the communication device.

In the end, it had to have been buried where I left it last time. Inside the rubble of a ruined house.

Excuse me, I whispered in my mind, and slipped into a ruin.

I investigated the transmission device, but saw no sign that it would operate like it did last time. It had no power and I could hear no voice from the receiver.

...perhaps it was not going to work unless a signal comes from the other side?

"Mh-hm."

As I walked briskly to rejoin with the Boss and Y I chanced on fairies.

This meeting too had them as busy as they were when I first came here, of course.

"Hurry, we hurry!" "To work, to work!"

The two were heaving and hoing with a piece of wood.

"Faireees!"

The feet of the two stopped on the dot.

"Is the master human... asking for us?" "As long as we're asked to stop..."

Both were nervous. They were afraid of something.

"Do you have a deadline?"

"We've received a commission, you see...?"

Ahhh, I had commissioned a way to go to the moon, had I. It was still alive and well.

"Did you find it?"

"...sadly, that..." "...it's with great embarrassment that we..."

So they were terrified of thinking they will be urged to do something like before, were they.

"At present we're on a search!"

As if you were going to start searching right now!

"...do you need the lumber? Why are you carrying that?"

"No real reason." "We're in the mood for it?"

It was mere showmanship.

"Just, please tell me where you are searching. I did some investigation of my own, but I could find nothing about my goal, you see."

"We, like, googled it?" "We googled it, right!"

"Googling?"

"We made a search engine, so!"

Oooh, a search engine, was it.

Then it was something able to search for information beyond the monolith, was it?

"May I come and have a look at it as well?"

The fairies' faces relaxed in cheer.

"Let's go?" "Will you postpone the deadline?"

"I will postpone it, I will. If you take me with you."

Though there was no deadline, you understand. Well, maybe there was...

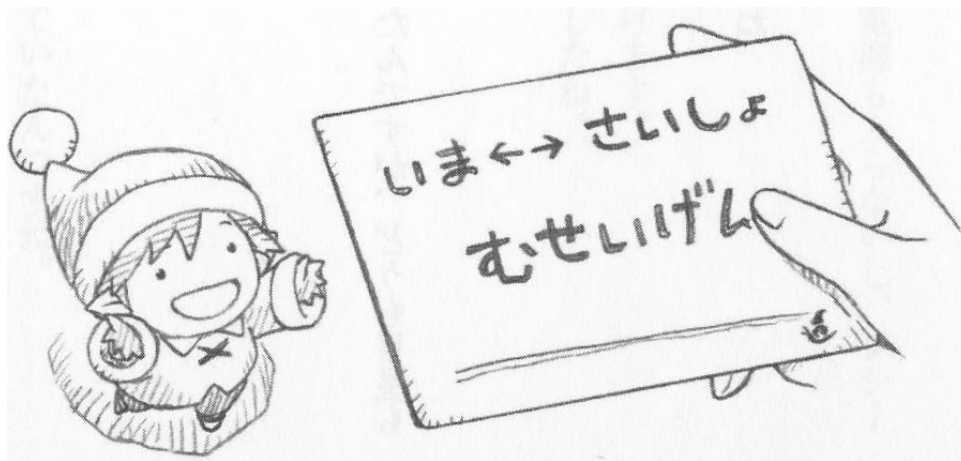
"In exchange, I wish you to take me there straight away."

"Then have this, please!"

I was offered a card.

This is what was written on it.

Now  $\longleftrightarrow$  The Beginning / No Limits



"...what is this postcard?"

"A free pass!" "Use it!"

Now? The beginning? So?

"Go on ahead, master human!"

"...uhm, what do I do with this?"

The fairy pointed to outside the Village.

In the dream world there was just barely something that was identifiable as a town.

That was because it was the birthplace of the shared dream, and outside was a single expanse of flat land. Whatever else, going on past that seemed likely to be dangerous...

"Go and don't get lost!" "Once you go, you'll get it!"

I parted with the fairies and took one step outside of the Village.

As the always went, the parallel plants... these bizarre fungal gigantic grasses made a thicket out of the plain.

Without any wind their tips leaned towards the Village, and seemed like they were pointed nowhere else but towards the real world. That was because all plants were attracted by the light and tended to grow like that.

As I walked this bizarre scene there were standing *road closed* signs set to block ways. That was the work of the fairies, of course.

It seemed like there was not just one, but several, all standing seemingly to surround the Village.

In short, they were saying not to leave the Village in a state of sole consciousness.

I did not understand the reason, but I instinctively hesitated advancing in my flesh and blood self. I for some reason had a feeling that my present self would come undone.

Given that, mysteriously, when I gazed over that darkness so thorough it was like nothingness itself enshrouding the place, I felt like I was going to be absorbed by it.

"...mh? Is that a train station?"

In that meditative scene so like a surrealistic movie I all of a sudden discovered a building.

It had not been there last time. Or maybe it was because I had that pass that I could actually notice it. I entered the building with confidence, but inside the station there were no people. Even the ticket gate just opened by itself as I approached. I walked the hall, as massive as the one in a Buddhist temple, and found splits in the path that led to the various platform. There were staircases here and there, and each of them also led to platforms.

There was no end to the splits in the path.

At a glance this was a normal room, but as I counted the staircases one by one I found that there I found that the count went on endlessly. Glancing at the guide boards I found platform #1, platform #1694758, and platform #9 3/4, all information that fostered confusion.

"In the end, this is a dream."

I chose one staircase at random.

As I advanced down the somewhat dark passage, I eventually came to the train platform. On the rails there was, stopped, a steam locomotive.

"Oh-hoh."

"Ah! A human. Welcooome!" "It's a human!" "What a divine being!" "We have a train passenger who is also God!"

I chanced upon fairies dressed in station employee clothes.

"It's so rare that a human would come here!"

"Is it indeed. At present, this location is sealed."

"Will you board?"

"What exactly is this?"

"A search engine?" "Steam version!"

"Is that a pun?"

Riding on this train and heading somewhere is, in short, abstractly expressing the act of looking things up, perhaps, a somehow haphazard but personally pleasing explanation.

"May I look up the ways in which humanity has gone to the moon?"

"That's an OK!"

"Then I am coming aboard."

"May the voyage be wonderful!" "Wonderful!" "bye!"

The train seats were, naturally, all free. There was no other passenger besides me.

Being a dream I could not examine the detail, but the inside of the carriage was of old fashioned make. Wooden floor and velvet seats. A retro style that was of my liking.

I sat down on a window-side seat and the sound of a steam whistle came soon after.

"Please dive on the other side of the white line!" "We're soon to make a search!" "Heading via lancelet to land on the surface of the moon!" "Those with a reservation for the Campanella line should get off!" "Uh-huh!" "This is all reserved for our master human!" "Onwards to departure!"

Heading via lancelet?

Seen off by the fairies, the train made the sound of steam as it began moving.

"...I hope this will be all right."

At some point, the train line had begun riding somewhere different from the grassy plains.

And that was... a scene that was impossible to describe. It was neither black nor white, nor a scene that I could specify, nor was it bright or dark. It was something like peeking into a different world from the train's window.

"Tickets pleeease!"



"Mh?"

A fairy dressed like a train conductor was walking down the passage.

"Is this pass all right?"

"Oooh! With this, you can even see the revolving lantern?"

"The one that shows all your life when you are about to die?"

The fairy tilted his head in puzzlement.

"Next up, we're headed towards something like the lancelet of the departure station."

At some point, the conductor was standing before the passage doorway and looking at me.

"Will you get off? Will you not get off?"

"What...?"

"The lancelet-like thing. Will you get off? Will you not get off?"

"If I got off, what would happen?"

"Extreme boredom?"

"Then I will not."

"...ahhh, you are the second master human to have done this!"

"Has someone besides me come here?"

"Someone that felt Hawaiian."

I could tell who that was.

It meant that Grandfather had come here before me.

I was completely clueless as to what he had gone through to do so, and while I could not quite ask the fairy, it felt absolutely plausible.

"I actually want to get off. Just for a little bit... it is safe, correct?"

"If that is what you wish, we only have to keep up appearances!"

As he said that, it became very animated outside of the window. It was no movie, it was a dizzying vision that resembled a countless number of images being fast-forwarded at high speed.

Next, that fast-forward of images gradually became something more leisurely.

What appeared when it suddenly stopped was a fish-like animal that I had never seen before.

Was this... the lancelet?

To be specific, it was something like a lancelet. "Something like" did not exist as a specific scientific name, of course... and so?

Though I thought it a fish, it was a much more primitive animal. The train turned towards that vision, and unhurriedly impacted it as if being absorbed by it.

My consciousness scattered, and the next instant it overlapped with the lancelet's.

"....."

I could not speak. I could only think.

I was, at present, vicariously experiencing this animal's thinking.

That being said, it was a primitive animal. It was not thinking anything important.

(...the way things are going, after continuing the act of feeding until I am satisfied, I will sink into the sand and meditate about living. After meditating about living I will be compelled to secure the location where I will lay my eggs, but after that it would be good to return to the act of feeding. On the way there I could be attacked by an outside enemy and have to run away, so my advance needs to be careful, I want to keep smoothly caressing the seabed. If time is on my side I want to engage in the meaningless past-time of wriggling back and forth while meditating as much as I can. Will I be able to survive until the next lay of my eggs? I must think, I simply must think about it...)

...quite rational indeed.

Was it being observed by the fairies?

"...huh?"

Next think I noticed was that I was once again sitting on a train seat. The change of scene was abrupt.

"Can we depart from the lancelet?"

"S-, sure."

The conductor hopped from the back of the front seat and leaped into the connecting corridor.

"We are now, uhhh, a local express!"

"A local express..."

"We will make some stops and not make some other stops?"

"Huh."

"Sometimes we pass by the destination station and go all 'awww'!"

"Our goal is the moon, mister fairy."

"You don't like wild goose chases?"

"I do not, or rather, they present a problem. May I go down the same route as my Grandfather?"

"Uh, you can..."

"Then the same route, if you please."

"Is that sooo...?"

...it appeared that where I was right then was, maybe, one of the fairies' escape routes.

Fairies were as elusive as phantoms, they appeared and disappeared anywhere at any time.

Perhaps they leaped through time and space using this method. And, at present, I was going down that very same path.

"Uh, next stop..."

The conductor uttered a name I did not know. An animal's name.

The slides at the train's window began switching up once again. They gradually gained speed, changing into each other so that none stopped before my eyes. They all seemed to be animals.

The figures of animals the size of giant monsters, which right then did not exist, passed past.

They showed the lapsing of time. A slide film of evolution.

Next thing I noticed was that the images had moved from underwater animals to overland ones, with the ages of the nautilus and the trilobite seemingly shot right past. A voyage of a hundred million years.

It seemed that on the way Grandfather had repeatedly alighted, and while this was a local express, it still stopped many dozen times at things like a complicated and creepy living being in which I had no interest, which made my irritation grow endlessly stronger.

"Will you get off?"

"I will not get off."

"Depression..."

That, although the conductor really wanted me to alight and recommended that to me many times.

Even as he did, the slides connected into an epic poem of the majestic and ancient Earth.

Those who looked would see it as quite dynamic, but those who did not look would see it as an extremely boring travel scenery.

There were repeated mass extinctions of animals.

And then the first mammals.

In a show like this dinosaurs, which would be the first to appear, went nearly unseen, and on

stage there showed up the first primates.

"Humanity's evolution, maybe."

If the show had a theme, then that was it.

Sure, this line will eventually lead to the birth of homo sapiens, and will eventually reach the moon, but... I believed there was a limit to how many stopovers one could make.

"...once in a while you should get off?"

"I will not get off."

"Downeeer..."

Quite the wonderful theme for being the preparations to a wonderful life, but I had my belly full just by gazing outside the window.

And still, I found the lives of people who had nearly entirely lost the hair all over their body to be fascinating.

It was the blank period skipped over at The School due to lack of information.

Scenes from that period of time flowed before my eyes.

Farming was attained. Wars developed at fixed intervals. There were great migrations of men.

Bronze and iron appeared. There were a variety of civilizations and societal progresses.

Without real reason I came to want to alight and survey the historical event of the moment.

These were not only recordings of historical events, there were also the peaceful scenes of people without fame.

At some point I had gotten completely engrossed in this.

I had definitely slackened my lips in a smile and was making a face that I could not show others, no mistake.

"Huuuh, so women from the BC era were like that too, I see."

"Oh Jesus," answered the conductor fairy.

"This guy is amazing, he reasoned heliocentrism despite it being the First Century... ah, he slipped and tumbled to his death..."

Time was advancing.

On to an era where more than half of the world was dominated by the unknown. An era where the deeper woods were considered a different world where the paranormal surpassed the knowledge of men. An era in which magic was believed real.

One slide from this set drew my eyes.

A woman wearing plain clothes was standing within the woods.

Perhaps her nutritional situation was not good, as she was emaciated and had a pale face. In hand she held the grass she had grasped from around her.

The material feel had gone sharply upwards compared to the visions I had experienced until then, which was refreshing.

The images shown until then were somewhat hazy, like they had been out of focus.

It felt sort of like this generation had suddenly improved in quality of picture cameras...

Regardless, the girl was showing me a startled face.

To put it precisely, like I was "someone" in sync with her.

...was I unable to be in sync with that girl? If I did, then what she was seeing and being startled by would become understandable, however.

On the spot I decided to leap over the link and sink into the girl's experiences. The switch in viewpoint felt spontaneous.

I could also confirm what she was looking at.

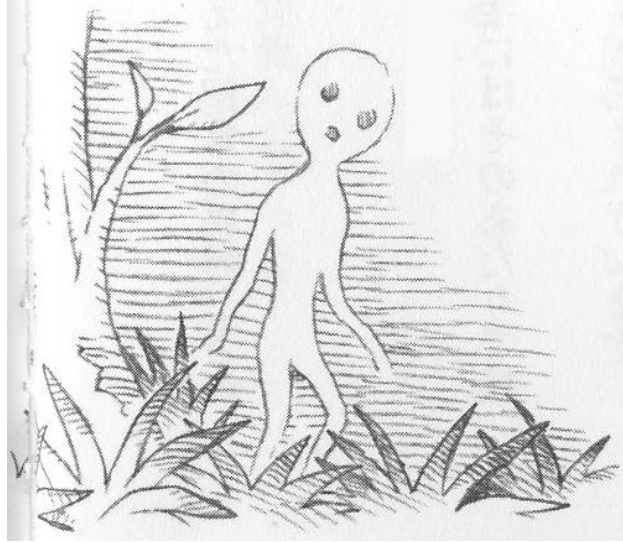
It was a fairy.

And so we reached it at last, the recording of contact between humanity and fairies.

Remember, their height was not even ten centimeters. And this was severely different from the fairies I knew.

The fairies of that age were hideously emaciated.

It was a frail being, much like smoke that happened to take the form of a man, he was not lively in the slightest. It felt sort of like he had no idea what he was, either... and that made him scary, if just a little.



He had no eyes in their sockets, they were pitch black.

I heard that the fairies that showed up in folk tales were also capable of causing harm to humans.

Well, given that the people of the era were inexperienced, perhaps they were the same.

The girl fled like a spooked hare. She was overcome with fear, of course.

The fairy tried to give chase, but was unable to, and he tumbled down. And then never stood up again, instead he collapsed into smooth sand and scattered away.

"Oh dear dear, he vanished..."

"He was happy in the next world?"

I had the feeling that, rather than dead, it was more appropriate to say that the illusion had vanished.

"...I see that fairies, in the beginning, were very much frail beings."

"What about that?"

"Right now you have become so very bold and brazen."

I thought that all the more keenly as I observed this well-plump fairy.

"Next stop is the soldier!"

The train window displayed a battlefield somewhere.

Right besides a forest, people with axes and spears were fighting at a level that the mere word 'fight' felt insufficient.

I wondered who and where could have possibly left behind a record of this era.

This vicarious experience, which could be said to be nothing more than the continuation of a dream which left me at a loss of words to describe it besides it being the magical work of the fairies, was however the recording of true instances of the past, and I felt that firsthand.

The soldiers were falling.

This war began as a group battle, but as time passed it grew more discomposed, expanding into one-on-one fights.

The fighting of some soldiers broached into the woods, and the curtain fell on them in the form of a simultaneous slaying of both.

That said, one of the two still drew breath, and he requested the help of his comrades. But inside the dimly-lit woods there was no trace of allies around him.

My consciousness was so sympathetic that I was immediately drawn to that soldier heading towards death. That was because he was still a boy, to call it, a person in the marriageable range.

In our synchronized viewpoint I discovered tiny eyes pointed at us.

They were staring fixedly at us from a thicket of grass. They belonged to a fairy.

Although their contours were clearer than before, the fairy was pale and still had plenty of the creepy about him, and I wondered what the boy would have thought of that.

That was the last thing that the boy soldier saw.

"He will be happy in the next world!"

"...in this age, fairies and humanity were not yet friends, then."

"We were only watching?"

"...there was nothing else to be done. People's hearts back then still lacked the required openness."

And then my consciousness was carried away once again, and a somewhat nostalgic countryside vista appeared on the train window.

"A scene that I would like to alight for."

"Yes, true!"

In an instant my mind was absorbed and overlapped with that of one of the figures shown in the picture.

"...if I had the time I would like to alight, I should have said."

Too late now, I was surrounded by a massive number of giants.

Startled I went to jump aside, but my body did not move, my linked consciousness alone withdrew from the target, and, as if bumping into them, possessed one of the surrounding people.

I then dwelt within the viewpoint of that someone.

I understood the situation.

The people working at a farm had discovered a stray fairy.

Height was about twenty centimeters. He was quite big. He was clearly not human even not considering only the size, however, and in addition his skin was a faint green.

The farmers were talking to each other, wondering what to do with the fairy.

I had a bad feeling about this. The farmers were becoming more emotional.

My ominous feeling hit the mark. These superstitious people reached the conclusion that they needed to eliminate the fairy. Awww... what a sad, primitive society.

"...I will gladly be excused from that tragedy and return to the train."

Right then, my body moved on its own.

It was not of my own will. It was this youth that I was inhabiting that leaped within the ring and made off with the fairy.

He was routinely mocked as a large-built idiot, but just this once he acted so nimbly no one could follow and resolutely rushed into the woods.

The boy kept running with an uncanny strength in his legs until he was deep into the dimly-lit woods, and once he made sure there was no one following, he crouched on the spot.



The fairy was shaking in fear within his hands.  
 The boy set the fairy on the ground. With the fairy taken aback, he told him to leave.  
 The fairy did not run away. He was dazed.  
 The boy shouted in anger. The fairy shook, then unsteadily ran into the depth of the woods.  
 Because I was sharing them, I quite understood the feelings of the boy as he watched the fairy run, something neither really anger nor irritation.  
 "Hmmm, a bittersweet conclusion... well, there was no bad ending, so let us leave it at that."  
 "He did well for the dark ages?"  
 The dark ages, indeed.  
 At this time, fairies were far from being beings able to bring happiness to men, indeed.  
 In this umpteenth passenger car, I for the first time sat down shaken.  
 This railroad of the heart then jumped like a local express to fully cover the points of contact between humanity and fairies.  
 It was generally all like the above-mentioned three cases, but there were situations that ended quite sadly.  
 I wondered, when was it that fairies and humanity became linked in the real sense of the word?  
 That question I kept with me until the next era.  
 An eccentric country I had never seen before:  
 the train stopped in a tiny country of the Asian block.  
 Era was unknown.  
 "Ah!," went the conductor.  
 "What is it?"  
 "Moon landings might already have happened in this age?"  
 "Huh?"  
 "We might have let the right era go past!"  
 "So humans had already gone to the moon in this age?"  
 "Looks like several people had already gone there?"  
 That would have been my first choice, of course...  
 "Well, it is fine. After all, what I want to know is not the first moon voyage, but a simpler way that would be created in a much later generation."  
 "Aye aye sir!"  
 The fairy waved a tour guide's flag and led the way.  
 It seemed that, all else aside, he was going to guide me.  
 It was a country that really drew my eyes.  
 The land it covered was small, but it was still an advanced nation. As the gaudy townscape was a densely packed with an abundance of culture, I could spot billboards in both Kanji and English wherever my gaze passed upon.  
 "...sigh."  
 It was not me who let out that sigh, but the girl I was inside of.  
 She seemed to be a student.  
 The uniform was of the blazer type, similar to what I used to have. The skirt was certainly short, which left me insecure.  
 "I really don't want to go home..."  
 The girl was on the way home from school, and was idly spending time in the business district's central plaza.  
 What could be causing the girl to hesitate to return home?

That was a domestic unknown.

What awaited the girl on her return home late at night was a verbal quarrel between her parents.

She was not even reprimanded for coming home late, so she just glanced at the two as they were engrossed in their fighting and withdrew to her room on the second floor.

She then wore headphones and played music at a loud volume. And with a truly bored look on her face.

She laid on the bed as she began tapping on a portable terminal that was the exact shape and size as PocMon.

That was what she did until the dead of night.

The next morning, the girl had these words thrown at her from her mother.

"I'm... I'm gonna divorce him."

"...uh-huh."

That was understandable to me, as I was synchronized to her.

Though she wore disinterest, within her heart she was all *eeek*. She was all *nooo*.

It was the bravado of a girl that had reached puberty. She was just forcing herself to remain cool. This was the quintessence of the Easterner, their Ninja Soul. Or was it Samurai, I wondered? Well, it was something of the sort. Ninjas could look cool with a toothpick even without having just eaten and all that.

Awww, how scary puberty was!

The devil of pubescence at times drove young men and women to behaving bizarrely.

"Y'know, I'm going on a trip with my friends soon, give me some money."

"What...?"

Although the still-young mother made a perplexed face for an instant, her facial features quickly turned back towards this nasty, self-interested expressionlessness.

The mother handed her daughter five sheets of paper. This was the first time in a long while that I had seen banknotes, which were no longer used in our era.

The girl looked at the notes and, after thinking a little,

"If possible I'd like to have the expenses for the trip, though."

When she did, the mother whispered *yeah, you would*, and, with an oddly refreshed attitude that could also be said to be cheerful, she took out an envelope from a dresser. The mother took out a bundle of banknotes right before her daughter without hesitation, skillfully adding over twenty more notes to the ones she had given.

A total of twenty-five notes. I had no idea what exact value they had, but it felt like they were quite the amount.

"Have some fun out there. The times of fun in life are the rarer ones, you know."

Her words of encouragement felt sort of out of place, they had a creepy sound to them.

The girl kept the notes and hung her head in silence, but... she was definitely not calm inside, that was certain.

"...you'd not hand a kid all this money, normally."

"Eh? What?"

"....."

"Shouldn't you ask dad the same thing? He might give you more, you know?"

Her heart in a thunderstorm (thanks to which me and the fairy were forced to wear raincoats), the girl left it at that and turned around.

As her mother had said, her father gave her a lot more bills. When she accepted the money, the girl's heart was torn to shreds.

The girl left the house.  
 She seemed set on perhaps never returning there.  
 "No good there, you got to go back. That is the wrong way!"  
 Being that I was sharing her mind and heart, I became wholly empathetic.  
 "Until you become capable of supporting yourself, you had better keep it steady and do things the right way there. Are you listening?"  
 The girl did not respond at all, she just hunched over as she walked.  
 "People around here only have the behavior of these older times?"  
 "Ngh, that is true... it is just a recording of the past, this... more than being ignored, it is that conversation is impossible, is it..."  
 This was an event that had already happened, a spectator from later could not change it.  
 Awww, that put me down...  
 The girl felt extremely hopeless as she spent time in a singing room (how nasty to ask for money just to sing!), and in the afternoon she went to school.  
 Her smile returned the moment she joined up with her school friends. Inside her heart... the truth was that she had not healed very much, and this happiness was no more than a temporary evasion.  
 They made merry in a restaurant. The bill was footed entirely by the girl.  
 Later, she crashed at this one friend's house, spending one night there. I see, that was why she paid for them. For now she had pulled through the night, you see.  
 The friend had parents, and it appeared that drawing up an excuse for her to stay without permission was achieved with great difficulty.  
 Dinner was brought up to the second floor, divided between the two, and eaten, a scene which made me smile.  
 The next day she crashed at another friend's house.  
 The day after that, at another friend's...  
 "....."  
 The girl seemed to only smile when she was with friends.  
 But that smile seemed to me somewhat hollow, it lacked a core.  
 She was not uncaring of her issues, that was what it felt like.  
 "I wonder how it was when it was me..."  
 I lost my parents when I was quite small, before I could feel sadness.  
 Life with a Grandfather who was much stricter than he was now was definitely not fun.  
 And in the end, I was shipped off to a dormitory.  
 Ahhh, I understood... we were similar, you see.  
 The era and our circumstances were different, but we both could be said to have had the cold experience of being chased out from our parents' home and suddenly made to live alone.  
 "I could not process this. I had no idea how to accept all of this. That was why I could only grow cold..."  
 "? ...but we'll come to save you at any time?"  
 "Thank you. But I was not talking about me."  
 Regardless, it was a mystery.  
 Aside from how the standards of crafting had lowered, compared to the present generation there was more than enough abundance: there were many people, infrastructure was solid so they could use electricity and water as much as they wanted, there were many entertainment facilities, it was a hundred if not a thousand fold more wealthy... despite that, she was living a life harsher than ours.

Could it be that the affairs of the heart could not be resolved with material abundance?  
 That people had to remain utterly sad and lonely until someone consoled them?  
 If so, the path ahead for the girl did not look bright. In my eyes, I saw neither of her parents as wanting custody of her.  
 "Sorry. Truly sorry! Looks like your parents found out about your secret sleepovers... they said no more sleeping over at someone else's house without permission..."  
 Her life of wandering through her friends' houses in rotation crumbled quickly.  
 "Ah, I could pay money? I do have a little, so..."  
 "It's not about that... sorry, I really can't let you do this."  
 All the other friends also replied that a second sleepover was out of the question.  
 The girl came to be forced to sleep outside.  
 What she chose were junk food joints open through the night.  
 She held out until morning with a number of drinks, but when she slept she was chewed out by the clerks. It often happened that partway through they made a show of starting to clean, chasing her out.  
 However, with her credentials (her student ID) she could not stay at for-fee lodgings.  
 That was why, sleepy as she was, she could not take but short naps sprawled on a table.  
 However, during the day she faithfully went to school.  
 If she was a runaway, why go to school? That was because she sought continuity.  
 Cutting off her ties with her family was that much of a shock to her, she could not also cut off her going to school.  
 However, that school life without a home did not last for long.  
 "...what? Tuition fees?"  
 The girl heard shocking news from a school employee.  
 Her parents were not paying her tuition fees, it went. And they could not be contacted, either.  
 The girl went home for the first time in two weeks, diving right into a cruel truth.  
 Her parents had vacated their home and disappeared.  
 "My, how nasty! Leaving their daughter behind, unbelievable! Was there not some genetic error here?!"  
 In the stead of the girl, who was speechless, I shook my fists like a spoiled child.  
 "Hah hah hah... kind of amazing... all of this..."  
 Although their relationship was shaky, it was given that there was a bond there, or so the girl had believed as she tasted the feeling of the line between good and evil snapping loudly within her mind.  
 She took out her terminal and stared straight at her mother's number.  
 She wanted to quickly call, bow her head, and ask their parents to fulfill their duty, perhaps. If she did, at the very least she would be able to return to school.  
 The girl was hesitating. The scales in her heart held one dish a cheap pride and one dish a plan for her life.  
 There were two choices.  
 Either give up on her parents and live freely, or live suffering at the feet of one of her parents who did not love her much.  
 "Sponge off your parents! I recommend sponging off of your parents!"  
 There I went, failing to learn my lesson and obstinately giving passionate words of support to an event of the past.  
 "Like slurp them to the bone?"  
 The fairies were always and constantly treating things like they were somebody else's

problem.

"Awww...!"

Except the girl put away the terminal.

It was because she was pubescent. The cheap pride was always stronger.

The girl wiped away the corner of her eyes and retraced her steps. A life with no place to call home was about to begin.

"You should definitely be with her parents. Even if it feels harsh, it is for just a few years! If anything else, you should just lodge at a dormitory. Even if the hand your parents dealt you just has the lone pair, even if there is no mingling of hearts, it would be easier to stay with them until you are capable of independence. Rethink this. Well?"

Though I attempted futile persuasion, I could not quite get a conclusion out of it.

"Mister fairy."

"Yes!"

"Was it ever possible to change the past?"

"Does that include bananas?"

"That is a ba-nono."

It was certain to be *those* bananas.

The fairy looked downhearted.

"...thing is, I gotta consult my superior!"

"I see..."

This just seemed to be tugging too hard on the heartstrings.

Despite how this was like reading a book, and could only let it go, I found this problematic.

Parents:

that word was beyond my ability to manage.

I was too young to be sad, and I believe not so much in discord with them to feel happy, so, in other words, I did not know anything. I barely had memories of them, after all.

"Will you continue the voyage?"

"Well..."

The girl, after that, could no longer go to that school she was so attached to.

She might have been able to pay the tuition fee with the money she had in hand, but if she did, she would not be able to keep her life going. She had to hold on to her cash.

However, her life afterwards rapidly fell apart.

During days she wandered the city, during nights she snoozed at commercial facilities, she lived a life of no productivity.

It seemed she had guidance or something, as she could take off her uniform and live in her normal clothes.

Those normal clothes she every day washed at a for-fee washing facility (!), but frugality forced her to first do it once every few days, then once every week... that was how it was going for her.

...and that aside, the country was wealthy, and it was a wealthy age, indeed.

I had been observing carefully and I had not seen one area of green, not even once.

All the land had been paved over by civilization.

In my hometown it was common to find dwellings standing with woods, green areas, and ruins scattered here and there.

Here, asphalt was there wherever one went, stores lined the streets, and even in the dead of night the movement of people was incessant, all of which made me doubt my eyes.



The number of automobiles was also beyond impressive. Automobiles drove about constantly no matter the street. They seemed to be driven following complex rules, and they had to be good ones that they did not crash constantly. Were Y to see this she would probably be impressed and not be quiet about it. Awww, the Earth used to be covered in civilization. And by a scientific layer as thick as the shell of a walnut. Worse, this was a point in time at least several hundred years in the past, and possibly several thousand. Science would be thriving even more, of course, population would increase as well, of course, and lots of things would happen, of course, and this all ought make the scientific layer grow thicker and wider.

"...it is a mystery."

"What is?"

"Why was a scientific civilization that covered the Earth mostly lost, I wonder?"

"There's nothing at all left of it?"

"No, if you observe, if you observe there are things, but..."

There were abandoned ruins next to the Village.

There was an ancient scientific city that I had traveled through recently.

There was a quite convenient automated construction facility.

There was a power distribution facility that was plainly useful to us.

For being there, they were there. They were, but... were there not too few of them?

"Maybe they were buried in layers of earth? But it would take many tens of thousands of years to be completely buried under, you know?"

Perhaps unable to grasp my question, the conductor was taken aback.

In our Earth, the state of science was that of a mosaic. Plants quickly slithered inside abandoned buildings. Similarly, areas that have become deserted of people were, historically, instantly swallowed by the woods... whatever else, there was nothing hard to understand in all of that.

It made sense. It did, but... was the world we were witnessing, in the end, in its correct shape?

I could not brush away that question no matter what.

Sigh, the bad habits of an indoor person.

When I had things on my mind I came to be worried by them even at times like these. ...as I could reach no conclusion, I could do nothing but stick a pin on it inside my mind.

Why did several thousand years of super-science vanish?

Conversely, for what reason did scientific technologies so convenient they could be called unnatural survive here and there?

Fairies maintained them, so they were usable at any time: thinking that, in the end, would have been much easier...

At some point people studied it, and even wrote theses about it... if they did, and sent them to their mentor, as well as to their fellow alumnuses, and then... right, they would have had Grandfather read and grade them... and Grandfather's scoring was harsh.

"...nothing left to do but give this up, then."

The young girl's life became messier before my very eyes. She was going off the rail, and with people capable of sniffing that out also there, the number of suspicious men and women calling out to the girl increased.

The voices they used were kind, but they were the lawless sort. The girl knew that well and

did not commit the foolishness of going in after them.

However, seeing creatures similar to vultures circling over her meant even outsiders could see that she was weak, and so...

"...say, could you fairies not have a few of your fellows go along with her? Just like you did for me..."

"Sorry, not possible!"

I took that like a punch.

And this from people who, back when I expressed my desire to go to the moon, did not promptly refuse.

A clear *not possible*, he said.

"W-, why? How come?"

"It's because... it feels like that."

"What? How does it feel?"

The girl, who had been laying on a park bench without nothing to do, suddenly opened her eyes.

Her eyes were pointed towards a figure standing within a bush... a fairy!

One of those from the period where they were still without eyes and had sort of a creepy vibe to them.

For convenience, I will be sticking a 'proto' before their name, calling them 'proto-fairy'.

"So... we meet."

"grats!"

The proto-fairy unhurriedly walked out from the bush and approached.

The girl unhurriedly lifted herself up. He was sort of creepy, but still, I hoped that she would not run away.

"A-, a tiny... person?"

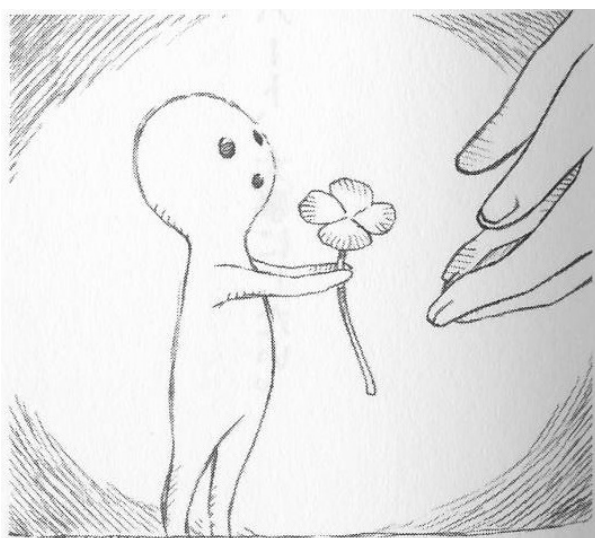
That was not possible.

He was too tiny. Not even twenty centimeters tall!

The proto-fairy held a blade of grass in his hands.

And he was holding it out fearfully towards the girl.

"...ah, a four-leaved clover? A-, and you are you giving it? To me?"



The proto-fairy had little capacity to express himself, and his face remained completely unchanged.

And still, if awkwardly, and though it was a tiny little thing, he definitely gave her a nod. It was as if he were saying that he made a human-like gesture that he had memorized.

"Thank... you."

The girl took the clover in both hands with her cheeks a little bit red.

This was likely the very first time that the two species had understood each other.

"Well, I am glad there was a warm event~."

"That's because we're a warm species!"

"It feels like I am understanding the reason why fairies like humans so much."

"Is it so transparent now?"

"You people may have been born by imitating the shapes of humans."

I was sure that, initially, the fairies were beings made of pure power.

But they were jealous of the species that lived with a body, such as humans.

And so they imitated them.

In the beginning it did not go right, however little by little they became more skilled at it... and then, although in different ways than originally planned, they reached the current fairy-like shape.

It seemed that they could not replicate the size, and while they became frail beings that felt like they could vanish at a glance, they most certainly succeeded in permeating into this world from an abstract domain that the eyes could not see. Maybe.

To put it in a few words, it was a step up from being less-than-life.

"True, true, we love humans sooo much our heads get all messy!"

"You did not need to say that out loud..."

Past proto-fairies were not beings as omnipotent as the present fairies.

Still, what the girl wanted they might be able to give, perhaps:

a true soothing that permeated to the heart.

To be with her, nothing more than that.

"...this will be all right, I presume."

That was because she had met a proto-fairy.

Because she had chanced on a being that would always be with her.

"I may leave and she will do fine, I believe."

"So you say, but all you're doing is wa-a-atch-ing!"

"Indeed I am."

I could certainly see her off until the end.

But I thought to myself that I would not do so and leave.

...if this had a downer ending then I would feel sucker-punched, after all. I took good care of my heart.

"The train is about to depart, sah!"

Next thing I noticed, I was at the usual carriage window staring at the girl.

"By the way, that girl back then, she married a nice relative?"

"Spoilers?!"

...well, I supposed it was good that it ended happily for her.

"And as name of her child she put the English 'fairy'?"

...well, as a name based on her experience it was fine, even if a little mean.

"Departure!"

The train began moving again.

"Given the current level of science, how good was humanity's reach towards the moon?"

"They more or less wanted to go to the moon?"

"And is that not a good thing! Could I just get off the train while we are on the way?"

"You would explode several times, however!"

"...does that not mean that the technology is unfinished?"

It did feel proper that there were skip forwards measurable in the hundreds of years, however.

"How about now, fifty years later?"

"Well, it looks like humanity gave up on the moon."

"...what?"

An image of the era was projected as a slide.

It appeared that sending people to the moon only happened in the beginning, and that eventually they stopped doing so entirely.

Voyages to Mars or Saturn were dreams within dreams.

Humanity's giant leap had, in a certain sense, reached its peak there.

The reason... cold hard cash.

It was an age where neither man nor country moved without compensation.

After all, going to the moon had a massive cost attached to it.

The majority of a space rocket was made up of its fuel, you see.

And so, even just to carry one liter of water to space required a massive cost in fuel.

When thinking about how much material is required to manufacture a single space station it became easy to understand how massive the amount of money that space exploration swallowed.

Using fuel to fly a rocket was serious business.

And the machine that Grandfather and his fellows used, which allowed for return trips on the same vessel, was a supertechnology developed in a much later era.

Scientific and technological breakthroughs were needed in order to go and return easily from the moon.

"...or so goes my parroting of TV science channels of the era."

I watched intently.

TV was so interesting, was it not. You could just stare at it idly.

Awww, I wondered how that zombie movie ended...

Well, all that aside...

The breakthrough came from an unexpected direction.

The high-speed roulette of images passing past the train's window fixed into a fairy.

"Right... a fairy."

"Oh?"

Somebody said this at some point:

science was at its limits.

Somebody else said this:

how about we rely on magic?

At this time, however, this was closer to a joke an American would make.

As the eras passed, the points of contact between human and proto-fairies increased.

Those who, back then, met with the proto-fairies believed in them, but they were not quite acknowledged by the world at large.

That was expectable, of course. Fairies in the heyday of science, truly, what else to say.

A time measurable in the centuries was needed for people to accept the existence of profoundly inexplicable beings such as them.

Well, once a hundred years passed, casual discussions of proto-fairies was overflowing on the network.

"Wah, we're so popular!"

"...but only a century has passed, and this is what happens?"

The Earth of that era was still very active.

Population was continuing to increase and people still had energy.

But, technologically speaking, they had peaked and hit a dead end.

By the time the Earth made one revolution, the new world had disappeared.

Advancing into space was as said difficult, and as time passed, humanity lost the abundance needed to make that voyage.

As the abundance vanished, fighting and discrimination appeared.

Wars and the Mama Caste were rampant. ...what was even this 'Mama Caste'?

Back when the maps were being repeatedly redrawn, the people's trust in what they called a motherland had remarkably lowered.

The structure of countries protecting their population collapsed, in its stead, powerful businesses shouldered the burden of country-making, coming into a monopoly of rights and privileges.

It was an age where economy ruled the stars.

"That's what they call a stratified society?"

"Yes. Nasty, is it not."

The economic fighting became even more intense, and in order to secure future superiority, space exploration seemingly became once again the subject of attention.

Unlike the previous boom of expansion into space, this time the goal was economic.

Carrying people and material via rocket was terribly inefficient, considering the cost. Means besides rockets, and which were lower in cost, were researched.

The dizzying succession of images at the train window eventually stopped on the dot before a peculiar, massive structure.

"...could this be..."

It was quite the elegant building, it was much like a lily laid upside-down.

A metal pole like a lightning rod stood atop the tapering tip, and one had to be surprised to find that it pierced the clouds and disappeared into them.

"That cable extends all the way into space... what an amazing piece of technology!"

"Maybe we can go to Heaven?"

"Only if we died..."

That one single cable connected the ground to space.

Using this cable it was possible to lift an elevator.

"Mhhh-hm. It does seem that this could be called a space elevator or an orbital elevator.

Myyy, incredible how reality caught up to the fable of Jack and the Beanstalk!"

"Is it bad to be like Jack?"

"It would be much safer than using a rocket that had been excavated... or so it feels like.

Grandfather would definitely have preferred going that way."

"Maybe this lacks Romance?"

"Well, that is quite possible..."

That man would occasionally play with his models, voiced sound effects included.

Now then, the problems laid on whether this space elevator or whatever it was existed in reality or not.

On whether this had been completed in the first place and at which point of humanity's history.



The upside-down lily seen through the train's window was still partway under construction. Still... I believed that humanity had to have completed this, definitely.

The reason was its cost.

After all, using propellant every time cost a pretty penny, but an elevator that moved on electric power would be able to cheaply carry materials to space.

That was why it was a certainty, an ideal, something desperately chased after, and therefore humanity ought have completed it, that was all.

"Now then, the next stop is Earth Station!"

I decided to alight and check things out. I also had to investigate on my premises. After all, I would later head towards it in real life.

"No objections here! Do as you will!"

"Yes, Your Majesty, with temperance!"

The vassals bowed their heads and quietly left the room.

In this present that room was a luxurious main hall.

The massive throne set in the eastern wall was filled with the majesty of a nation.

The room was held up by several dozen round pillars with horizontal grooves, and between these pillars and the ceiling there was an engraving of a (supposedly) holy animal, the skipjack tuna.

The legend of the founding of this nation was drawn on the wall, and a splendid velvet carpet covered the straight line between the throne and the entrance.

My consciousness overlapped with that of the figure sitting on the throne.

It seemed that I had somehow possessed the king of some country.

Though king, he was in his twenties as far as age. Image-wise he was closer to a prince. He was well-tanned in the sun, he seemed quite the brash young man.

"Is this the last audience of the day?"

"Yes, Your Majesty, with temperance!"

The male valet let out a thundering voice from the bottom of his belly, and took a magnificent bow like a tipped-over letter L.

"So, next up on the schedule is the formal meeting with the Vertical Line contractors."

"Yes, Your Majesty, with temperance!"

The valet took a bow at a wholly identical angle.

"And after that, a banquet with the famous Japanese-Sino-English economists that Our Country is sponsoring."

"Yes, Your Majesty, with temperance!"

The valet took a bow.

"And even further after that, though at a late hour, the long-delayed lecture on arithmetic."

"Yes, Your Majesty, with temperance!"

ValBow (abb.).

"I am so very busy, are you sure that I can get a good night's sleep tonight?" "Can you understand irony, as well?" "Are you idiots?"

Those questions of the king's were answered with the exact same tone, attitude, and angle and a *"Yes, Your Majesty, with temperance!"*.

It was like they were in no mind to hold a conversation.

"...that's enough. I am to make ready for the meeting with the contractors, so leave."

As the valets left, the king let out a big, big yawn.

It was a masterful, magnificent yawn, and I say this as a yawning expert that Y once retorted

with a, *"stop yawning at every damn thing! It pisses me right off!"*.

Now alone, the king kicked a pillar in anger.

"Ow!"

Every day, every day without end there was this continued pre-decided and tough schedule, which made the king tired and irritated.

It was an island nation in the south.

The high rise was being built with great clamor in that tiny little land.

Being an island with a circumference that could be traversed at a walk, why it had cars and motorbikes driving about it was a mystery.

It was clear at a glance that this was a rich country.

There was a relaxedness to people's smiles, and they were energetic.

"Ah, the King is running away again. 'Morning!"

"..."

"Your Majesty, with temperance!"

"..."

"Ahhh, it's our King! Marry me!"

"..."

The King was loved by the population.

However he, personally, did not pay the slightest bit of attention to the voices of the people.

He took to completely ignoring them.

Because the King's clothes were showy, he was easily recognized. That was why he had hidden a change of clothing in a public toilet on the way.

When he slid a hand into the arm of one of those torn, dirty, sweat-smelling, and tattered clothes, it was like solemnity itself had been suddenly yanked away from the King's shoulders. They were the clothes he procured by swapping his for a poor boy's back when he first succeeded in running away.

Now in tattered clothes, the King was no longer addressed by anyone. That felt very good to him.

And so the King nimbly ran.

He stiffened for an instant when he saw the figure of a policeman rushing towards him, but the man ignored the King and ran past him.

"Heh heh, another day in which the King and Pauper Strategy is successful!"

The hardest part of running away was right after slipping out the King's Palace in his gaudy clothes, the King knew that well.

The King ran, leaving his precious schedule abandoned behind him.

After rushing up a stone staircase there was suddenly a grander vista, and he could see the emerald blue sea and the massive building floating on top of it. It was that lily flower from before.

"...so it is located in a southern island. Can you tell latitude and longitude?"

"Those tiny little details are, well..."

The gaze with which the boy observed the structure was all too cold.

The Easter lily had been built on an island on the sea, and countless oil tankers went back and forth around it.

"Pft. What's this space elevator thing about anyway. It can go collapse for all I care."

Though it was being built by his country, the King was not one whit happy about it.

The King reached the shore.

All aside, the country was tiny, so he was there in the blink of an eye.

"...hey, I brought it. You there?"

He called over to the deserted sandy beach while carefully looking around.

From his breast pocket, the king took out a carry-all bag he had brought in secret from the palace.

"Hey, I got that Deluxe King's Soda, special order imported from the sweet factory island! Want it?"

Hearing the term 'cola', one proto-fairy jutted his head from behind a boulder.

"Co-, la?"

He was big proto-fairy, about twenty centimeters in height. He was much more plump than the specimens I had seen before, and I felt relieved on seeing him. The creepy open eye sockets had become somewhat smaller, and there were undeveloped eyeballs in them. It seemed that he was getting closer to present-day fairies.

The proto-fairy approached the King with unsteady steps. His motions were clumsy, and he looked ready to stumble and fall.

His eyesight was also possibly weak, as he was feeling around with his hands as he took the bottle of cola with *Royal Use Only* written on it.

"Got cola!"



The King's sullen facial expression suddenly softened.

"Gonna empty this!"

The proto-fairy thus put the bottle to his mouth and, without even touching it, the bottle cap popped off.

"Ohhh! What kind of magic is that?"

"...fireball?"

"Do not just make stuff up..."

The two(?) sat on the shore side by side.

The proto-fairy was the sole and only friend that the too-young King had.

"Gulp! Gulp! Gulpity-gulp!"

The proto-fairy guzzled down the cola.

Because the country comprised countless islands, land by itself laid scattered about, and each island had their own settled role.

For example, this was the capital island, next to it was the airport island, just as nearby was the residential district island, and on the opposite side there floated the newest artificial island, the one where the space elevator was being built.

The sweet factory island also belonged among those, it was a postage stamp of an island that only produced sweets.

"How have you been these days?"

"...passable?"

"I see. That's good. I'm bored."

"Are you?"

"Yeah, it's all boring. The guys at the castle, no matter what I say, always answer *with temperance!*. Their by-the-book education made them that way. Officially they are standing before a king, so they don't treat me in the slightest bit like a human being."

"That's sad!"

"It's not sad, but it does piss me off. What's there to be temperate about? What's temperate about their shouted voices? Idiots. I'm fed up with being constantly looked after by those people, and I flat-out refuse to be used for political purposes."

*If only my father was still alive*, the King whispered feebly.

Right, he had also lost family, I see...

The King's eyes focused far away. However, even when focusing far away he could not avoid seeing the lily that stretched to the heavens.

"Why you, Lilium, you're provoking me!"

"Lilium?"

"It's the name of that tower. It was decided via national referendum. Means 'lily' in Latin."

"The other day I saw the string snap, mister king!"

"So it did, it snapped!," the King was furious. "...seems they had problems with the strength of the tether. It's just a big joke."

By 'tether' he meant the cable that connected the ground to space.

"To tell the truth, I could have anticipated this failure. The strength of the tether was one of the points that wasn't clear all the way from the beginning, you see. It was a complete farce by those idiotic ministers who just wanted to have a budget."

Wow, that was a serious problem.

Then was this orbital elevator a fake?

*"Mister fairy, please question these people on this matter."*

*"...! Mr. Past will do nothing but ignore Mr. Present!"*



*"And you do not tolerate the bullying of the present, correct?"*

*"Should we sue him in a classroom court?"*

We already knew about this.

We could do no more than wait to see if the conversation in this scene became interesting on that regard.

"That's a problem," went the proto-fairy.

"The prospects from here onwards are much more problematic, you know. They seized upon that lack of any expectable solution to cajole an even bigger budget out of us. This planet's full of countries who want to throw money at that elevator."

"It's off!"

The proto-fairy, who had finished drinking the cola, pointed at the first thing past the coral reefs.

As unsuitable for this beautiful scene, there were inelegant warships coming and going.

All else aside, this proto-fairy... he was fat, was he not... maybe he had had too many sweets?

Could have been that this was not the process towards becoming a modern fairy, it could just have been that he was fat simply as a personal distinction.

"Those are frigates. They're from our navy, but the ships themselves are borrowed from foreign countries. They will soon be reorganized as the defense army for that space elevator, but I expect we'll coax some more out of those countries."

"You can get good things if you coax people."

"...the other guys can't just do this for free. They of course expect to make a profit. But that profit is an illusion. That Earth Station is nothing more than a very pretty-looking pacifier for the sponsors. It's all so stupid."

The King was being incredibly frank.

He must have been incredibly stressed, indeed.

"...say, can't you get something done about that with your magic?"

"I wonder!"

"If you wanna thank me for the cola, do that thing you always do!"

"All right!"

The proto-fairy tossed up the now emptied cola bottle.

The bottle failed to fall to the ground and instead kept floating.

"Ohhh, amazing like always! That's nothing short of magic!"

The King showed the proto-fairy an innocent smile that was more appropriate to his age and clapped his hands.

"I can also do this?"

A clump of the beach's sand was suspended in the air, took the shape of a medusa and began floating.



"...damn those cabinet guys, if only we could use this street performance-like thing we could fill the gaps of our technologies, and that's why I'm so fed up with them."

*"I heard a key word. Using the proto-fairy's magic... cannot be, does he mean that?"*

The tether had snapped, that's what I'd heard earlier.

*"Data's up on the elevator's pamphlet!"*

*"My, how convenient!"*

It was electronic data, but at present it was shown to me in book form.

*"I see. I understand."*

*"So you did!"*

I will now briefly speak on the matter of the orbital elevator.

It will be an explanation that will be easier to understand rather than accurate, however.

Please visualize someone throwing a hammer.

The athlete is the Earth, the hammer is a relay station set in geostationary orbit. The cable in between is the elevator carrying people and goods going up and down.

The elevator is operated by electricity.

Therefore it does not need fuel and its cost is cheap. Even better, it can be reused many times.

Well, what was inaccurate was that the cable did not necessarily have to connect to the station. The station is in geostationary orbit, so the hammer's cable thrower was actually gravity.

Geostationary orbit was a convenient point about thirty-six thousand kilometers away where centrifugal force and gravity cancel each other and things neither fall nor move away.

Given that even by this era humanity had fired countless artificial satellites into orbit, constructing a station there was all else aside a realistic endeavor.

The problem is the strength of the cable hanging down from it and connecting to the ground.

All else aside, the distance was the distance, so even if it was not really enough to connect to the station, a fair bit of tensile strength was required.

*"According to the pamphlet, the completion of the elevator is a round seventy percent, but as*

*far as it looks like, it is thirty percent or less, at present."*

*"Is it a lie?"*

*"A big fat lie."*

All else aside, it looks like those people in this southern country told lies to gather money in order to preserve their leisurely lifestyle. Seriously, how wicked of them.

*"It's because you master humans are all so good at lying!"*

*"...sorry about that."*

It was embarrassing to be pointed out as a single family of people.

*"Still, it is written that this plan, which started with technological inconveniences one hundred and forty years before, was later resolved with technology given by the proto-fairies... but I am wondering if that is true."*

"Found him! I found the king here!"

The men rushed up to the shore.

"Oh no, you gotta run! If you're caught, you're on the slab as an experimental subject!"

"Noooes!"

The medusa floating in the air turned back into sand and smoothly flowed down as it fell.

The proto-fairy was in a panic as he ran away somewhere, while the king, in order to get attention on himself, ran the opposite direction.

"See you later!"

The proto-fairy waved just his arm then crawled under the sand.

"Heeey, Your Lordship, please, wait with temperance!"

The valets chased the King with angry looks in their eyes.

"Hah, as if I'd let you catch me so easily!"

He was caught in three minutes (well, it was a small island).

For how they nearly had no land to them, the islands commanded an abundance of wealth.

Farmland was near zero. All the necessities were imported.

In part, there was a traditional fishing business that just barely hanged on as little more than a hobby, but fundamentally the country was made rich by tourism income and the space elevator fraud.

*"The more I learn about it, the more absurd this country seems."*

*"It's what can be expected from you master humans?"*

*"I do not wish to be revered for something like this..."*

I did managed to quickly investigate the matter of technology given by the proto-fairies.

It seemed that, once in a while, people who grew attached to the proto-fairies were born in this country, and those people were installed as monarchs.

*"It appears definite that proto-fairy-given technology was being used in that lily."*

What shocked me was how the orbital station had already been built up in the world several dozen thousand kilometers above.

What was definitely unresolved was the fishing line in between them, then.

This felt more realistic than I thought. A-ma-zing.

All that was not clear were the strength and material of the tether part. That being said, so long as no new material capable of doing the job was discovered, it was a problem that would not see any progress in its solution.

After all, it was the elevator's safety net, it allowed ascending and descending.

And it was, at present, what many foreign countries demanded a positive outcome about.

To get past this impasse they would even borrow the powers of the fairies. Hence this scheme

that saw a young king elevated beyond necessity.

That said, the present king did not want to offer up the proto-fairy, his friend, as an experimental subject.

He even kept the fact that he had a relationship with a proto-fairy a secret.

"Oi, I told you not to come to the palace, did I? There's lots of surveillance cameras in here." Despite that, the proto-fairy appeared in the palace gardens, in a peach tree which surprised the King.

"But I understand what they're talking about?"

"Talking about? With whom?"

"The cameras?"

The King made a face that said he did not understand.

He certainly had the feeling that all the cameras as far as he could see were unnaturally pointed the other way.

Did that mean the proto-fairy could hold a conversation with machines?

Well, it was no mystery that a fairy would be able to do that much.

"It's a coincidence, all right? Well, whatever. I'll tell you about a path that has no surveillance cameras. This is a secret route that nobody but me knows. I'm telling you as a special favor." These two really got along well.

The king was spoiling the spiritually young proto-fairy like he was his younger brother.

That was why he did not really like the idea of using magical powers to make a profit. He also believed that the fraud may as well be exposed, for what it mattered to him.

*"Are the ministers really that bad?"*

*"In what sense?"*

*"I can understand that they would irate the King. But the King is pubescent. Pubescence means rebellion. Even if the ministers were good people, they might be able to anger the king regardless."*

*"Like those guys, those bigwig guys, who are couch-potatoing over there?"*

*"Let us figure it out."*

As if going the opposite direction of the mental link, up on the second floor of the royal palace, in a room with good ventilation, three ministers were taking a break. They had subordinates bringing in food and drink, and they even had a menu for this purpose, it was the ultimate in luxury.

"Looks like we got caviar today."

"Yes, but I am tired of it. I prefer Kobe beef these days."

"You should just order both. We have money. Now that you remind me, I haven't eaten any foie gras these days."

"The World's Three Best Flavors are in heavy rotation these days, I'm honestly tired of them."

"Then will sushi do? I hear there's a good chef in residence."

"Is there anything that isn't seafood?"

"Shark fin's also from the sea. Oh, how about liver? Today's menu got liver sausage."

"That'll do. Red wine too, please."

...degeneracy the likes you could paint a picture of.

*"Drinking while on duty repels even me."*

The topic among the ministers was the King.

"Still, does the *boy* really get along with a fairy, I do wonder?"

"There's witnesses accounts according to the research department. It's a small island, so I guess it's a fact."

"Still, so far he's been uncooperative, so we should maybe replace him with someone new."  
"...the procedure is a pain in the neck. Besides, the boy is well-loved by the media, and he's also popular with the populace."

"I worry that the anti-elevator faction will send in terrorists sooner rather than later."

"That would certainly be sad. Besides, if the boy became cooperative and offered us magic, then in the unlikely chance that the elevator is completed with that, that by itself would be a problem."

"That's true... if we put our back into it, then we can prolong this for another decade, no, five years. An accident with the tether would be the perfect time to make a profit. Using this as excuse and we can get additional spending money."

"That's exactly it. Oh, it's one in the afternoon. Today's work time is over."

Ending work at 13:00, was this a dream country?

...this was bad, I had sympathized with these evil ministers. How embarrassing.

Not handing over magic is profitable for the ministers, then.

I wished that I could tell this to the King.

"...truth is, I know. I can hand you over, I can not hand you over, neither mean any harm to those guys."

The King was of course wise and aware of the ridiculousness of what surrounded him.

"Is this what you call a dead end?," asked the proto-fairy.

"It's depressing. Giving power to those people, really! And where would you end up in the end..."

The two were not on that shore from before, they were sitting down in a back alley in which people did not go. The beach had been marked by the valets and they could no longer use it as a place of refuge.

"...what do you wanna do? From this moment on... you do have friends, do you?"

"Do I?"

"You're not thinking anything, are you. Or rather, do you have magic with which to create a strong enough string?"

"Same, do I?"

"You got enough to make things move without touching 'em. That alone's something."

The power to make things move without touching them...

I thought about that for just a moment.

A moment later, an understanding struck me that nearly made my hair stand up.

That was the power to manipulate matter. It was the power to move all the particles and atoms, all which comprised matter's fundamental components, without touching them.

If so, then what could he do?

He could do anything. In theory.

He could manipulate magnetic forces and gravity as well.

*"Although I must say that the power of the fairies felt like it could do the trick... maybe they are not particularly good at manipulating gravity? Then they lack the ability to control it fully?"*

*"That's because it wants to settle down every which where."*

They could generate any possible substance, and they could make any necessary precise adjustment as well.

It was a power that deviated from the standard interactions of the world of nature. Magic, there was no other possible way to call it.

It could not be measured by price. It was a power that could radically alter history. And it did,

in fact, radically altered history.

–Earth, at this point, belonged to the fairies.

It would certainly not have been strange to find that handing over this power to humanity had been discussed for a hundred years or more. That said, the right of decision was entrusted to a single boy.

I was visiting a historic turning point.

And, right then, a couple of men rushed over to the King and pinned him down. The proto-fairy had long since disappeared into the shadows.

"Woah, what are you guys doing?!"

One sealed the King's mouth with adhesive tape, the other straddled him so that he could not move. With the King's resistance impeded, they looked around and made sure that there were no witnesses.

"What do we do? Do we take him somewhere?"

"Nah, there's nobody around, let's do it here. We only need to hide the body. After all, we'll be on the plane in an hour!"

The two appeared to be citizen of the local country and spoke words of the land. That said, their attire was hideously shabby for a country this wealthy.

The King was in great panic, and one of the two took out a knife.

"At least do it so that he won't suffer."

"You people have pushed our backs to a wall."

The knife was held aloft as the man spoke words of complaints. The proto-fairy seemed to have understood the situation before him at that point.

"HEEEEEEEELP!!! SOMEBODYYYYYYYY!!!"

The proto-fairy shouted out in desperation.

The oddly monotone voice stopped the men's hands.

"Is someone hiding over there?!"

The proto-fairy did not answer, instead, off from somewhere came the light sound of an approaching engine.

"A bike's coming near..."

"And no one's riding it?!"

A three-wheeled motorcycle rushed into the alley at tremendous speed. It did not look likely it was going to slow down before what could be said to be a collision course with the two men.

The three-wheeler sent one of the men flying.

It impacted with the wall and stopped after that, and next up came a tremendously loud horn.

The remaining man was utterly confused, but eventually decided to drop the knife and run away. He was not allowed to do so.

The second man was suddenly picked up and dangled from the air.

"What, a crane?"

A small-type crane, installed for a building under renovations, spectacularly grabbed the second ruffian.

"How could this all happen..."

The king, who had released himself from his restraints, stared at the passed-out duo with bewilderment.

"Master king, are you OK?"

"Did you do this? All this?"

"I was just pressured into doing this?"

"Pressured, but by whom? Both the crane and the trike lack drivers, you know?"

"By the crane and the trike?"

"...so it's true that you can talk to machines."

"As long as I can see them, I can talk to anyone."

Hum, so a proto-fairy could do that. Anyone as long as he could see them.

*"The proto-fairy can also talk to animals, or something to that effect. But in reality, how is that?"*

*"We can talk with anyone, except for those that ignore you."*

That was the same for humans, my dear fairy.

"Whatever it is, it's some impressive power... so much that I'd rather say that you people should become the rulers of this planet."

The King said that with a face like sanity had returned to him.

I was sitting back on the passenger's seat.

*"...what, already? And the conclusion?"*

I leaned into the train window and found the King standing there, having matured into a young man.

It seemed that the recording skipped over quite a bit.

People in worker's uniforms gathered around. The King himself was also in a worker's uniform.

"My, you've grown to be a fine fellow."

That said, we had of course gone too far forwards. I tried rewinding the recording a little bit.

It seemed that the people targeting the King were residents of the islands. This was big news. These radical terrorists were born from a dream team of foreign extremists and the extremely poor.

The duo of ruffians was going to receive a reward for killing the King and had plans to escape the country. Meaning there was poverty even on those wealthy islands, nothing less.

After that, the perception of the King largely changed.

There were recordings that showed that he became cooperative with the elevator's construction work. Of how he offered technology sourced by the proto-fairy, as well.

The birth of new technologies born of the mixture of science and magic was explosive.

The King had showed his strength and now grasped real power.

Using the power of the proto-fairy he could manipulate surveillance cameras and all that sort of equipment as he pleased, and easily overthrew the ministers. As his ability to do so showed, it could be said that he had grown up.

And then, ten years later, the engineering problem had been resolved, and a series of red letter days arrived.

The tether made of new materials was lowered from the sky station in geostationary orbit and connected to the earth station, Liliium, without trouble.

Looked in at a distance the scene was simple, but this was lowering a fishing line from thirty-six thousand kilometers in the sky, it was simply magnificent.

Up until then they had to fire up rockets to get personnel and materials up, but from then on it was possible to exchange resources using the tether. At present it was little more than a very tiny station, but eventually it was going to grow into a massive spaceport.

"Look at it, fairy. That's the proof of our friendship."

The King was tearful as he held the portrait of the deceased.

"...d-, did the proto-fairy die?!"

"He's on his deathbed with diabetes."



"Diabetes..."

The proto-fairy in the portrait was definitely a fat one.

"Too many sweets?"

"A beautiful way to go!"

"That is not beautiful."

...I did think that I had to be careful with those things, as well.

And so it was that, on that day, space and earth were connected with a string.

The King spoke in front of a TV camera,

"If you are ever in the mind to, then you can simply climb that string like in a fairy-tale. No staircase has been installed at present, however."

The reporters laughed.

Thanks to the King's intervention, all rights of usage of the elevator were ceded to the UN. In an era where national power weakened while the power of corporations became stronger, the UN, which had actively seized rights, was also single-minded in approaching super-jobs of the yada yada etc. etc. (not interested).

The elevator came to be called the International Vertical Line.

In this case, Line indicated a literal motion engine.

Right, a railway.

"...I wonder if that is why this is based around railways."

The elevator (itself; the box part) that this space elevator's tether moved upwards did indeed hold a visual resemblance to a train.

And thus it was that humanity, with little cost, was able to distribute things vertically.

The economic effect was in a single word tremendous.

It could have been said that it was the last staircase that appeared before humanity as they were losing the steam of their earlier years.

Climbing those stairs, people were able to accomplish one final Giant Leap.

They could explore and take over the moon and the artificial satellites, install stations, and maintain the infrastructure.

Because they were situated outside the atmosphere, they could secure an unlimited supply of power from the sun, its sale further magnified the participation of private enterprises, and an economic ecosystem was born.

After all, no matter how hard they worked, man could not leave the solar system. And that was why that had become the final Leap.

Images quickly replaced each other.

Generations were passing past at tremendous speed, and in that flow of nearby structures appearing and then vanishing, only the inverted lily remained there, unchanged.

The proto-fairies were shy.

They did not show themselves except to people that interested them. That is why there were nearly no records left.

And still, they continued contacting humanity at every important step in this history rushing by.

Little by little, little by little,

the proto-fairies appeared and disappeared like illusions.

They had bodies and therefore died, there was a prior example of that, but that was new, understand.

The fairies of old knew the concept of death.

To live and thrive in this world a flesh and blood body is needed, so, necessarily, there was then a need to accept death.

The more they shouldered the burden of that risk, the more the world dazzled the fairies of that age, then.

At this point, all I could do was pray that that chubby fairy had died with a smile.

If he had died with a smile, then he would have been happy, understand. Though he was inexperienced, maybe.

And that was why I was absolutely not going to accept that he died in solitude.

"...this is enough. I am done reviewing."

The means to get to space definitely existed on this Earth.

The moon... it was within reach!

The location was an island empire at the equator.

The conductor fairy hopped in my lap and said this.

"Will you be visiting them?"

"I shall visit them. Soon, preferably."

"You want to go there soon?"

"That is a matter of course. I wish I could fly there right away."

"I'll help you!"

It looked like the fairy wanted to help.

"I must go to where the this elevator is. May I ask you for help in every way necessary?"

"Well then," his round and cutesy eyes shone with light. "Can you lend us the body?"

"What do you mean?"

"It's a free service from our train line?"

"I am thankful, but what does that service entail?"

"Just by lending us the key, we will come see you right away!"

"Your words are simply not enough, as always."

"Key is in the pocket!"

I thrust a hand in my pocket and took out a key I had no recollection of.

"What is this all about this key?"

"It's a master human's key?"

Awww, this promises turbulence ahead...

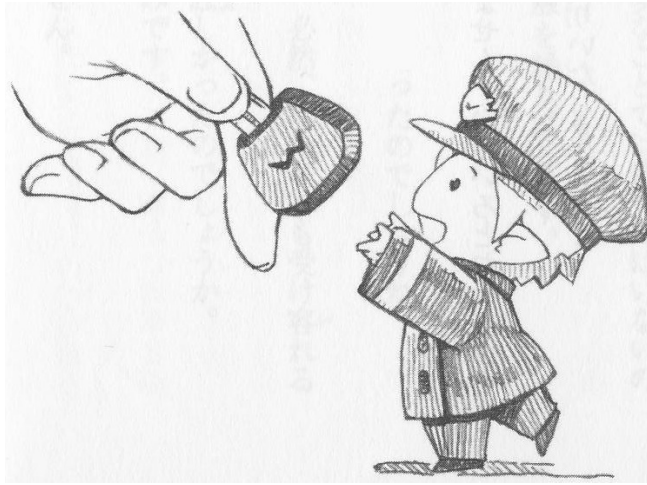
"...I have no time to be involved in pointless trouble, all right?"

"Be at ease! It's the shortest distance between you and ensured safety!"

It looked like he was giving this his Seal of Approval.

"It's as safe as leaving your car to the hotel valet!"

"If you say so..."



The conductor fairy hugged the key he timidly accepted.

"With temperance!"

Ah, he was being uncreative.

I felt uneasy because I did not know what the whole thing with the key was about, but after handing it over I found that nothing whatsoever had changed. Ah well, that was what it was. The train kept going forwards. It was now a rapid that did not make any stops.

I occasionally looked outside the window, and found that scenes were being shown there. Sustained by the excess amount of energy available, technologies were being developed. Behind these laid the omnipotent power brought by the proto-fairies and the magic they provided. Many problems until then considered unsolvable were solved and science reached a shockingly high standard. It was an age in which the stars themselves were covered by a new layer of technology.

It was in this new age, likely a fulfilled one, that humanity welcomed its period of Decline.

First, the population's increase stopped, then inverted into a decrease.

The big cities depopulates, productivity fell, economy was in ruins.

They gave up updating human history, the gaps in information became remarkable.

Science, which had become so lofty, gradually failed to be inherited by subsequent generations and became lost technology.

The difference between lands that managed to repel decline and those who did not became big, and even reciprocal compatibility was lost.

At present, the technology that was excavated and reused was the remnant of a technology tree that spread randomly in all directions like a badly neglected garden tree. Because of that, gathering records became an incredibly big mess of a work, a true annoyance.

It was an aging of the species that had become evident in the span of several centuries.

I had urgent things to do, I could not quite experience everything vicariously, but Grandfather might have. With a local train.

Though, because nearly no recordings of this age remained in the present, what I had witnessed were incredibly precious records.

Humanity had given up recording, but the fairies' train line weaved its way through the whispers and the sounds of people.

"The central bank has closed, what do we do with the money we have right now?"

"Is just one month's worth enough to put in reserve?"

"The UN will supply it via rationing."

"If it was originally so expensive you couldn't get it, now it isn't made by anyone and it's impossible to procure."

"There's a rush in the demand, gather all the scraps of paper you want, but..."

The currency system was being replaced by one of rationing.

"A decrease in productivity was feared, but it appears that in recent years we finally stopped that. However, some say that it was simply too late. On this matter, Whey University's social studies department..."

This was what a newscaster said somewhere somewhen.

"The city center, now sealed, is dangerous and so they said there was no admission to anyone. No, no, there are no bandits. There are beasts dwelling there."

"People have really decreased of late, huh."

"Abandoning that field's a pity, but sadly there's no people to work it."

"So in the end there's only my family living over here, huh. What're we gonna do? Do as the UN recommends and move to another village?"

Forget cities, people were disappearing even from villages.

"...I know the city's been sealed ever since before I was born, but to live in an age where even the nation is depopulated, well..."

"Living in the city would be harsh with this rationing system going on everywhere. But I don't think it's realistic to believe people like us could be self-sufficient off in some other land."

So went a conversation between farmers.

"Did you hear the fairy broadcast from the UN? They say the fairies are the new humanity, and gave them human rights!"

"Yeah, I heard. Human rights, fine, but... never ever caught one of 'em fairies with my naked eye."

"If that's what you say, I played with one of them when I was a kid. Soon as it looked like I was going to be a badly-raised boy, yeah, when I later learned they were fairies I was shocked. Fairies vanish real fast."

"Heard it's the instability of their substance. Just how are we gonna let that kind of folk take over the next generations?"

"Part of engineering uses fairy-sourced technology, right? Haven't they already taken over?"

"The guys are so fragile that it's gonna be hard for them to make new history."

"Worse, I have it that fairies are nearly completely blind."

"Yeah, that's what it was. I remember now. Those eyes are decorative, they perceive their surroundings via magic or something."

"...they're kinda like bats, man."

This was a discussion in a seedy bar.

"I'm Chappy. Let's play! I'm Chappy. Let's play!"

That was the voice of a doll that for some reason continued reciting that in a ruin in some land where people had stopped dwelling. There were countless tiny footprints inside that shop filled with dust.

"....."

The remains of someone who passed away in solitude were being battered by the weather without anyone to mourn them.

"\_\_\_"

It used to be a bustling world where EM waves jumped from one point to another. Now it was a world of stillness onto which nothing but the light of the sun poured.

*"I got it! I got it! I got... reality is the only layer where the soul manifests. Everything else is darkness."*

This statement lacking in religious awakening was graffitied on the wall of a ruin.

"Oh dear, this is rare. A kid, I mean. You alone? So you have no parents. Hungry? ...it's fine, eat as much as you please. We have enough that this old bag alone couldn't eat it all. You should also go live in whatever house you please. After all, this village got no one living in it anymore except for poor old me."

A happy random meeting that happened someday somewhere.

"...he's a replaced child."

Circumstances unclear. Sound recording only.

"Our ancestors may have died, but us younger generations will fix this."

The young people left behind in a depopulated village all took each other's hands.

"My, what a nice village."

"Been so since the UN's trade caravan started making stops here. We're getting all sorts of people and material here."

"This land around here should be cold given its latitude, but it's if anything way warm and real easy to live in."

"Guess the fairies are protecting us."

"And it's only gonna get more active, no mistake."

"Can strangers move in as well?"

"Heard that, long ago, tons of fairies lived here. And even now I think we got some."

"People are coming and going so fast it becomes easier to transmit infectious diseases, so we'd better start doing inoculations."

"The UN services in this village are really welcoming. You got some strong connections or something?"

"Please, you must bring your granddaughter here sometimes. We live in the same village. It feels so sad that we can't see her face at least once a week."

The quiet generations continued, so I skipped time in the order of hundreds of years, but I suddenly stumbled straight into a bustle that was much like a cluster of data.

My soul was forcefully pulled closer and, of all places, was thrown inside the train window.

"Master human, have a Dream Lobster as in-carriage service... huhnh?"

Tall plants covered all I could see.

I was rocked left and right as I advanced through an area that I could not see beyond.

Suddenly my eyes pointed down, and what I saw were not my toes but my fingers.

...was I on all fours?

The one I dwelt with unhurriedly stood up. Or, rather than unhurriedly, with motions that had the instability of a cat attempting to stand on his hind legs.

What came to my sights at first was a flock of sheep.

The grazing land was magnificent. The fence was of piled slate stones. The distant village was a bunch of wizened buildings painted in very showy colors.

The scene felt somewhat nostalgic.

"Biped..." "There is a biped..." "The child of the bipeds..." "So close..." "A biped in our domain..." "This annoys me..." "It annoys me very much..."

The sheep were making that racket.

I sort of recall hearing the word 'biped' somewhere else...?

No, first things first.

It seemed that I was quite the distance away from the center of a village.

The current host was exceedingly unstable. She could not stand for even a minute, she just fell face up. It was grassy, so she was not hurt.

"D'ahuuh!"

She was a baby. I was, at present, linked to a baby.

Why suddenly and unwillingly into a baby I did not know anything about?

An impact shook me the instant I formed that question.

It was the faint tremor of someone striking the ground. Someone had rushed over behind me and helped me to stand. I suddenly could see as if I had become taller.

...my and well, what a troublesome child to have come all the way here on her own.

It appeared that I was synced with the intellects of the sheep, as I heard the woman's words as exceedingly muffled. The moment I was carried at her breast I saw her face.

I felt nothing on that instant, but had a large pulse of sorts a few moments later.

An elegant man followed further back, and he hugged both the woman and I. They looked like husband and wife. Or rather, parents with their child... they were a family, of course.

...could it be that it could be...

"Dear bipeds, Our name is Philip Howard the First. You people are invading our domain. It is painful to tell this to you, when you so well attend to us all, but could We have you leave? The terrain beneath the hill, with no grass, would also feel easier for you to spend your time."

One of the sheep baah-baahed at the feet of us three.

...and there went that person (sheep).

The one I had met was the Third, so there was no mistake, this... was the past.

And the ones that were now holding a baby were my parents.

Which meant, in other words, that the one being held... was me.

I had landed in a Kusunoki Village of around twenty years before.





A family with child was living on the outskirts of Kusunoki Village.  
It was a life of only the three of them. But it was a fulfilling living, one that lacked nothing.  
The father helped with farming. The mother worked hard raising the child.  
It was the image of a family that exemplified the minimum measured unit of Living.  
I only remembered that time in the faintest way. And while I sat there dazed, I had lost everything.  
...even this baby has finally calmed down.  
...of course, dear, and the mysterious things finally stopped happening. It's a good thing.  
Mysterious things.  
It was a conversation through which one could see that there was something difficult with how the husband and the wife raised their child.  
...the ambulance comes here next month, you know. I expect that we can have that DNA test that I had applied for in advance.  
...oh dear me. Let's just not do it. This child is in no way a Replaced Child. She's our daughter. Look, when I put her down in the light of the day... she runs off to hide in the shade.  
...yeah, this is unmistakably our daughter, indeed. This baby is definitely growing up to be the perfect Indoor Type.  
Genes were scary.  
For all this, me being a replaced child...  
They meant a child replaced by the fairies.  
I was involved with something like that previously, but in a land with many fairies, that was actually the go-to folklore.  
Elves and trolls would replace human children with their own. That was why, compared to other children, the replaced child had something wrong with them. Their ears were sharp, their fingers too long or too many, they could eat anything, they were a teensy bit taller than average... it was simply scary to think about replaced children.  
I could not believe that I had been suspected of being one when I was young.  
Grandfather had to be living nearby, would that also be one of the reasons he was living away from them?  
But whatever the past was, right now they were a perfectly normal family with child. It was a scene of child-rearing that could be seen anywhere at any time. There were no accidents, no drama, no crime, no punchlines. It was a happily-ever-after thing.  
Every time my parents' faces came into my sights I felt a sweet pang of numbness and could no longer think anything. Like finding, after great difficulties, mere water in a desert, it felt like the sweetest of nectars.  
Whatever else, it looked like I was loved.  
It looked like I was raised with great care.  
I knew all that, but since I did not remember much, I felt fulfilled. It felt that a previously inadequate gear finally clicked into motion at the bottom of my heart.  
It was a sudden impulse.  
I happened to have done it.  
At a glance I was a baby, in the heart playing the adult.  
I felt alive once again. It was a temptation hard to resist.  
Forget everything. So that you may remember everything.  
But because I had forgotten everything, I also forgot the painful events. What a fool.  
My parents died all too easily in some epidemic.

The funeral was held in the chapel on a day of cold rain. I had already become able to walk, but only understood vaguely that my parents had died, so I was wandering about here and there. I no longer had anyone to guard me. Because I was only experiencing this vicariously, I had no control privileges on the body. As I looked around the one room of this chapel of old build I poked and prodded the things that were there.

It was much too imprudent of me, if I say so myself, but you have to understand that children are like that.

"...so only the daughter didn't get the illness?"

"...right. The fairies are definitely looking after that child."

"...I wonder if she's a replaced child. Maybe that's why she doesn't get human diseases?"

My adult mind captured all the malice that happened to pass by me at the time.

Were it right now, I could rebut.

Being a replaced child is something any young child has a possibility of becoming. Maybe. Because of how a child would feel when raised in an environment so harsh that, lonely, they come to no other possibility but to regret being born, and become single-mindedly obsessed with going back to before they were. Maybe.

...this was bad. Everything was uncertain.

Regardless, the fairies would not replace children. That much I can guarantee. They merely felt dazzled by humans. ...maybe.

Now that I felt bored, I suddenly went and left the Village. It was as I always did.

"Master human, have you come here?"

"...yes."

Once I had left the Village, many of them would appear.

Though the majority of the residents knew about the fairies, there were many that had never even seen one of them.

Individual differences also determine whether they would be visible or not. They also determined whether they would grow even more attached or start fearing the human, and I could have been said to have been blessed as I positively ticked both checkboxes.

But speaking of society, though there was no mistaking that they really existed, there were many out there that said they did not. People living hard enough tended to find it difficult to see fairies.

This despite how the Earth was, at that point, theirs.

The UN had admitted to that, so they were Earth's foremost living creatures. Still, it felt like they were making light of them, and I empathized with that, of course.

"Wanna play hide-and-go-sea-urchin with everyone else?"

"...sure."

"Then the one who becomes the sea urchin should prey on sea slugs, please!"

"...what?"

"Master human is now the sea urchin!"

"...sea... urchin?"

The fairies scattered with a '*waaah*'.

Though fearfully, I did my best with preying on sea slugs... which was of course impossible, so I just stood there, afraid. It was surreal.

Still, it was fun. So much fun I became dizzy.

There were no other children of my same age in the Village at the time, so they were the only

people I could play with.

We played for many hours, and it had gotten to the hour when the funeral was soon to be over.

I returned to the chapel to witness the figure of Grandfather hugging the coffin at the center of the place, his shoulders shaking.

"..."

My (young) state of mind was of indifference, so I did not have any impression of it but a *huh, he's crying*.

Normally and everyday a difficult being to approach, Grandfather acting like that was incredibly rare, and since it felt like I should not have been looking at him like that, I made sure not to make a sound as I furtively left.

In my breast there remained an emotion that I could not explain, one which dragged its feet for a long time.

It was an emotion that a child's heart could not process.

My life with my sole and only flesh-and-blood relative Grandfather, who by then had already lost Grandmother, had begun.

It was a cold household.

A house of no smiles.

I had quite the wanderlust when I was young, and I often found myself easily moving off to distant places. Even my parents had a hard time with this. As the person herself, however, I could say I was earnestly intent in playing with the fairies. I could understand that that was a cause for concern for my relatives.

And that was why Grandfather was harsh with his curfews.

Take the present situation of how I was one minute late.

...if you make it to adulthood without serious problems I'll give you freedom. Until then, you will follow human rules.

It was a promise made to me by Grandfather when I was young. I only then remembered it.

...until you become an adult, you will not just up and disappear off somewhere.

Well, it was also possible that even Grandfather, through his work at the UN, knew about the existence of children who wished to go back to before they were born.

And he maybe did not know how to raise one.

At the time, I was simply terrified of my Grandfather.

After that, he decided to send me to a boarding school...

I ended up leaving my hometown behind without reconciling with Grandfather.

I was unsatisfied in several ways, of course.

...but in a variety of meanings, I thought even now that I was glad to have gone to school.

Awww, I gotta go to the moon—

Behind me and my vigorous wishing there was a locomotive gliding along with the sound of steam.

"Master human discover'd!"

At the locomotive's entrance was the conductor, waving his hand towards me.

That instant I was sucked in vigorously, and I drew a spiral from my head and was twisted around into the passenger's seat.

"Next stop is the end of the line, the front of the moonbase!"

A steam whistle came from a distance.

I alighted at the terminus.

"Gotcha to the front of the moonbase!"

"What?!"

The Mental Railway went up vertically and pierced through to the lunar surface.

Or so it had looked like, but in fact the rail itself was set vertically and the train was gripping on to it as it stopped.

The train's platform... if that was how it had to be called... could hold a dozen people at most.

It was an all too save-space of a station.

It felt like the station's building had been ripped off the ground and set back vertically. Maybe I should just be calling it a tower.

From up in the sky the station's building looked like a wizened old wooden building, but with my gaze lowered I saw it was an inorganic, hi-tech facility.

I felt that something was wrong, like it had gone past the surreal.

Like I was standing on the joint that linked dream and reality.

"Well, this is the result of the search! Satisfied?"

"No, well... huh?"

With the conductor and his satisfied face on my shoulder, I was nothing less than utterly perplexed.

This was the moonbase... said the fairy.

Let us give in to him for a moment and concede that this was the moon.

"Is this its present condition?"

"It's now!"

Thanks to their being connected via dreams, the magic of the fairies could search the memories of people via collective subconscious (probably), and this was what they reached.

We were in fact searching for an easy way to reach the moon.

Well then, this all meant that, once the space elevator was discovered, the process of searching for a route was nearly done.

So long as I was not thrown out of the window, I should have been able to come straight here.

"...this is the lunar base."

"It would be happier if you wore this on your head?"

Like ants playing with the shells of insects, the fairies were laboriously carrying fish bowls.

"Fish bowls are not made to be worn, you know?"

"Yee-es! Normally we're the ones stuffed inside!"

"No you are not, you cannot!"

Except it looked plausible for fairies to be grown inside these, something like an aquarium, and the fairies themselves looked relaxed, so it was easy to imagine all that.

"These are our spacesuits!"

"They look like fish bowls."

"The ones we made're different!"

When I finally tried asking them about it, I found that they had brought spacesuits as supplied by the base.

"Found also the body parts!"

A different lot of fairies were laboriously carrying a lockbox.

They opened it and found khaki overalls inside. They had airtight seals, making for fine spacesuits.

"The changing room is over there!"

"....."

In the changing room, the way to wear the suit was explained via illustrations.

"T-, this is quite hard to wear..."

The overalls were all too stiff, it was difficult to even fit one leg within, and I was stumped.

The size was perfect, however I could not call its wearability as comfortable not even as flattery. It felt like I was jamming myself into a suit of armor. That being said, it was made to operate in a vacuum, so there was nothing better than sturdiness, however.

Still, the figure of myself reflected into a body mirror was that of someone who was wearing a stiff suit and a fish bowl on her head, or, to express it accurately, that of a weirdo.

"Pi-pi-pi!" "Pi-koko!" "EM wave emission!" "This summer we're obviously going into space?"

As I exited the changing room I found that the fairies were also all fishbowl-style.

"Where did those space suits come from?"

"Waaah, it's so you!" "Magnificent!" "Divine!" "Heavy rotation confirmed?" "Will you keep wearing this?"

"Well, thank you very much for that..."

The weirder what I wore, the more the praise from the fairies. On the exact contrary, they wore clothes that would repel a normal person were they to see them. The fairies' sense of style... was much too different from that of humanity.

"Your body is lent to us, so we're bringing it with!"

The conductor returned to the train. The mind was over here, so the body was lent to them, was it?

He said he would bring it with, whatever that meant.

No way, could I... be having an out-of-body experience?

"You know there is less gravity on the moon? But right now it is perfectly normal, you see?"

"Mh?"

Maybe I should have readied myself for all this to end with me finding out that this was Earth all along as soon as I took one step outside.

"Master human, it looks like it's this way?"

The fairies that had remained pointed at a part of the wall.

I entered the next room and bam, the ceiling lights turned on.

"A passageway is next, is it?"

There was nothing that stood out. No people were passing by and the ceiling was low, making the area oppressive. As I advanced I found another door. I opened it into a third room. Immediately another door. Then immediately a small room. Repeat.

The space was fragmentary so as to protect the whole from any holes opening in the structure, of course.

I passed through the last doorway and came to a hall so massive that the stifling environments until then did not feel real.

It was large enough to hold maybe two or three cricket fields. The interior was in a white so pure it was startling, and the signs here and there marking emergency-use equipment and electrical connectors made this feel very much like a space facility.

There was not a single window, so I could not tell what was outside.

The word 'base' tends to make one imagine a formal and stiff research institute, but in actuality it was a simple and modest facility. There were show windows, there were benches, there were massive wall spaces that could be used both as theaters as well as monitors.

All conveniences that left the strong image of something that would serve the population.

It was a base from a generation a fair bit more advanced than the one that barely just reached the moon... well, more than a base, it was a lunar city.

With coming and going at a low cost possible via space elevator, it became feasible to

maintain all these facilities.

A crowd of people was moving about the square.

"Hi, hi, hi, hello hellooo!" "How's it been of late." "How did the investment in water go?"

"Excuse me, transport vehicle coming through. We are going to pass along the red line. It's dangerous so please step back!" "For this day we will be the Terran vegetable seller. Anybody wishing for something will please..."

Businesspersons in suits and attendants in work uniform, a group of what seemed to be tourists, and women with children that looked like the family of the personnel: all of them were smiling happily.

For an instant, I was marveled at how much population there was on the moon even now, however... when I passed by a show window fitted fully in one part of the wall's surface I saw how I really looked like and was disheartened on the dot.

...I was a robot.

Worse, a drum-shaped robot of a type I remembered. Sigh, back when I was in The School, one of these was of great help to me... even the manufacturer appeared to be the same. These well done 3D images of people were at a glance living creatures, but on very careful observation it was possible to see that they merely repeated similar motions and words at fixed intervals.

I had to complain to the fairies about this, I thought, yes indeed.

"Faireees! You can control the dream, right?"

"You can't?" "It's a dream, so jump!" "They're the real deal, you know?"

"Are we not inside my dream?"

I had accessed the collective subconscious of all of humanity via a dream and searched through what was a form of memories, that was how I perceived the current situation.

I was to find the means to go to the moon, wake up, and go there in reality: that was the plan.

Therefore, it was about the right time to wake up.

"You are wrong, all of you! I did not want a dream of the moon, I was searching for a way to go to the moon in reality~!"

The fairies gave each other perplexed faces.

"You wanted to go, and you did?"

The fairy's summarizing was circuitous and hard to understand, however caution was necessary, as it might have had a deeper meaning in actuality.

"Please use more words than just that."

"You tried going, you wanted to go, and you did?"

That did not increase in informational value.

"I want to go to the moon with my own flesh and blood body!"

"And so you went?" "You even went through the railway!" "Confirmation confirmed!"

"It does not feel like I have encountered that sort of information."

"This was it when just a mind, this is it when also a body?" "It's because you searched with those terms!" "Even in searches, the body is in a crawling style!"

"Then, of course, in reality I must go to the moon via the space elevator, is my understanding not mistaken?"

"Yee-es!" "Right now only your mind has come, master human!" "Mental signals have safely arrived!" "Next up you only need to return to your body and call it over."

"Fine, fine, I searched for a route to reach here in my body as well, and since I have arrived all the way to the real moon as a signal, that is all well and proven."

"Is it rare for a master human to come all the way here?" "You're the second of late!" "Not long ago we led one here!" "Be more fun if it were always like this!"

"That would have been Grandfather, of course. I see... but I am only having a dream, understand."

"The mind is also a signal?" "A jump into the data from the dream, from the memories!"

"Everybody's just tied together!"

What they are saying is that dream, consciousness, memories, electronic data, and network circuits are compatible.

Let us clear out all that is impossible to understand as the fairies just doing what they always did.

After that, via further dialogue, it became clear what path my mind had gone through.

Dream → collective subconscious → a database of human history that exists who knows where → network circuits that even now survive between Earth and the moon → a still-operational robot found inside the lunar base.

What I had done was nothing less than jumping off from a dream, a voyage of the mind.

...which all meant that, though in mind only, I was at present in the real-world lunar base, that was what it was.

I had changed the vehicle I had been riding several times without noticing.

"I am inside a robot, so there was no need for a spacesuit, was there?"

"Fanservice?"

"...thank you, how considerate."

"No big deal, no big deal!"

"Then, even this 3D-image-like thing is just a recording saved inside the robot's memory archives."

"Tho that robby's in charge of taking pictures of the vistas on the station."

"The vistas on the station?"

That was a service from long in the past, indeed. Well, let us leave the research for later.

"By the way, it is perhaps about time for me to wake up."

The fairies made complicated yet blank faces.

"...awww!"

"What is that for!"

"Your body was left in our charge?"

"That was how it went. That means that while my mind is here my body is protected, something like that?"

"It's mebbe a little different from that." "Even after waking up, if left on your own, you'll come here?" "I sooo wanna see a master human get serious!"

"W-, what do you all mean?"

I had a bad feeling about this.

In times of emergency like these I could not avoid being vigilant. That was why I more or less went along with the fairies' premise. I was therefore resolved to some measure of trouble, but was it asking for too much to wish that I would not be made to expect it?

I suddenly remembered when, recently, the people of the Village had become inhabitants of the dream world.

Because they wanted to linger a bit here, they became able to control their bodies from the dream side, fulfilling the minimal motions required for going to the toilet and eating, becoming



automated people.

In short, when hungry they would automatically raise from their bed while still asleep, then eat. While still asleep.

"...if the fairies are doing the same thing..."

W-, what was going to happen?

I could not quite imagine.

"...mister fairy."

"Yes-meow!"

"About the body I entrusted you, are you certain that it would not be hurt or anything of that sort?"

"Hurting it would be preposterous!" "We borrowed it knowing about our duties!" "Your latent capacities were fully awakened?"

The term 'latent capacities' made me unable to help feeling uneasy. I wished they really, really did not do anything improper to it.

"Well then, how long will it take for my body to be delivered here?"

"Huh. With the old man it took about a second, it indeed did."

"That short? W-, well..."

It was not like they could poof it here in a second with magic.

"What will you do?"

"...well then, in however long you need."

"Agreed!"

They were hesitant, but they still kept to their conclusion that it was going to take just a little longer.

"I would like to find my Grandfather, I will be exploring a little."

Surely he was not within the base, but as it seemed that the lunar surface had been explored much more than I thought, I held to the hope that it was the former possibility.

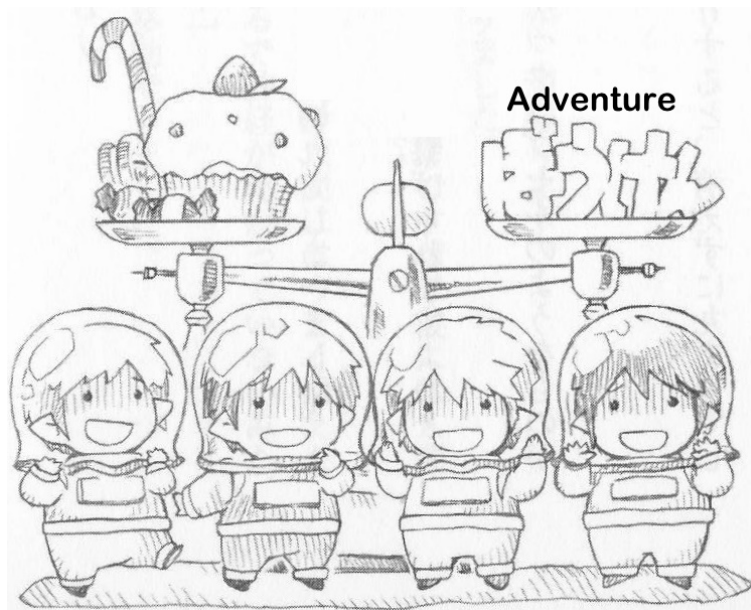
"Adventure?" "Do we adventure?" "Let's!" "I love adventures!"

The fairies were making a racket.

"It or sweets, which do you prefer?"

"...?!"

It was amusing to see vertical lines of agitation appear on their faces.



And right then a telephone set into a wall rang.

"Looks like a phone call...?"

"So it does!" "It's so ringing!" "A phone call with nobody!" "Do they exist?"

"No, rather, the question of who could be calling is more pressing..."

I was startled. I rushed to the telephone. However, the call dropped one breath later.

There was no one who was likely to call except for Grandfather.

"Misters fairies, the dream, the 'net, the wireless, they were all forcibly connected, right? And so that call and this robot's communication device..."

The instant I turned around there was a dry thumping sound, and four plastic capsule-like things were laying on the floor.

"Ah, fairy spheres."

When startled, when excessively bored, when the part of their being that was sweets was insufficient, instead of vanishing they Rounded Up.

I tried thrusting my hand in my pocket so I could give them at least some caramel, but then remembered that this was the moon and that I was here in mind only, riding on a robot.

Sweets: none.

"...this is indeed a problem."

For now, I gathered the spheres. If later on I found sweets within this base it will be possible to revive them, but a moon with no people was a difficult place for fairies to remain active.

And all this meant I could not promptly answer the question of how I was going to go to the moon.

So long as I had at least one fairy at my side I had nothing to fear for my life. Right then I was in the mood to pray for blessings even if they are in a Rounded Up state.

"Grandfather..."

I began my search alone.

Without the fairies the mood was one of somber silence, but I did my best.

The mind being I and the body that of a robot meant things were somewhat troublesome.

The robots had not been originally made to synchronize with human consciousness, but he

had been given with some functionalities that humans do not have.

For example, there were three built-in manipulators, and they were not easy to use for a human with two arms. I could only and barely move two of them. It was like no nervous connection existed with the third, and I could not move it at all.

Conversely, the motion device had no problem synchronizing, and I smoothly moved wherever I wanted.

As for visual and auditory data, there were active sensors, so of course there was no problem.

Intuitively accessible functions worked for me, indeed.

What were not intuitively accessible were the robot's skills... such as the cleaning device installed on the robot's bottom, but just as I thought it impossible to activate, it turned out that a human's mind wanting to clean the floor turned it on.

And the ferocious hunger that I felt was, in short, the robot's battery about to expire, was it not.

"I g-, gotta charge, I gotta...!"

I was panicking.

I had previously seen PocMon become frantic in her search for the charging base, and I had the feeling that I now understood how she felt.

There was an oddly appetizing power outlet in one of the hall's outer walls, but inserting the charging plug did not produce even one drop of electrical power. I felt as if I was trying to suck the pollen out of a wilted flower...

"...the instant fairies disappear, things get serious."

My body was made of resin and I could not sigh.

In the darkness, there was a section that was blinking with a green light. It was an emergency-use supply point where one could get electricity and oxygen. The normal charging spot did not supply power, however the emergency-use one was still live.

"Electricity is so delicious..."

I thought it would tingle, but it unexpectedly had a deep and rich flavor like that of minestrone. I was satisfied.

The electricity supplying facility lived in a state of dormancy.

This was good news. The probability of Grandfather being alive went up.

Incidentally, those 3D projections I saw at the beginning did not originate from the base but were stored in the robot's internal memory, and the actual state of the interior of the base was one of power outage. Pitch black.

The robot had many sensors, so it was fine even without light.

The hall was round, and there were passageways radiating in the four directions.

Looked at from above, the base as a whole looked like a pizza.

One slice of the cut pizza was a living quarters, one a warehouse, one a research lab, and so on.

There were many doors that could not be opened with the robot's access key, so I could only investigate the places I could go to.

...I found nothing important there.

Nothing of importance, still I was afraid I would stumble over something not good (such as bodies), but, happily, I did not chance upon anything of the sort. The pluses vs. minuses equaled zero. I could imagine that there had been no particular chaos during the evacuation of the base.

To not mince words, these were lunar ruins.

It looked like the layout of the base had been inputted into the robot, so I understood it on top of my consciousness with a nuance of, *oh I know so~ much about the layout of the base*. What I knew from this detailed knowledge was that there were many bases dotted around the moon.

This was also good news.

It was possible to go to and from other bases with an underground subway system. Should the shuttle have had to make an emergency landing, and should we have reached the point where someone needed to rescue them, then I could depart from the closest base, that was why it was good news.

If.

As I sunk deep in thought I felt like I had fallen into a hole with no bottom.

Realistically, would the passengers of a shuttle that crash-landed on the moon be still alive?

How was their stock of oxygen and food? Would they be able to medically help the injured?

...if I was to cling on to a low probability, they would have better chances of survival if they moved to a base near the crash-landing.

Right now, except for expecting that, there was... nothing...

The majority of all the bases (this included) were buried under the ground.

Earth was protected by the atmosphere from space radiation, but since it was pouring without reserve on the moon and its lack of atmosphere, the living quarters naturally had been built under the ground.

That was why it was impossible to see anything at all of what was going on on the lunar surface.

Restoring power was definitely top priority.

"...hmmm, the power supply room is clearly topping 4A on the Margherita slice."

My, even the addresses here were based on pizzas.

I was hesitant to conclude whether pizzas were sweets or normal meals, you see. In the past, when I had fairies judge it, I got a shake of the head in regret and a *"sorry, but this is only some round thing"*, and inside me it became a normal meal. ...this had nothing to do with anything, mind.

And as I chatted about all that, I reached the power supply room with the same difficulty as going someplace in my own home.

The door was closed, making it physically and electronically sealed.

"I must break it to open it..."

The robot did not have that functionality.

With power restoration having become impossible, there was nothing more I could do.

I could only go to the hall and to specific areas outside of it.

A-, and that was when the phone rang again.

I tried picking up a nearby receiver, but I could not move. It seemed that the call sound was coming from inside my head.

What was transmitted to the robot's wireless communication device was, for some reason, converted into a human's voiced words and reached my consciousness as if it was being heard by the ears.

"...hello?"

"So it's you, huh?"

"Grandfather?!"

We had managed to make contact.

"Are you hurt?!"

"Nothing serious. Worried you, did I."

"S-, so I see... I am sooo relieved."

Made me feel the shakes all over, this did. I had ascertained that Grandfather was alive. I had sort of fulfilled half of the goal I had in coming all the way to the moon.

"It's all thanks to the fairy you left me. We managed somehow. I'll give you my thanks."

"I see..."

As expectable, fairies were reliable even Rounded Up.

"So, where are you now?"

"I'm staying at City Seven."

"...and where about is that?"

"Right now you're in City One."

"Curt name, that."

"I have it that political care has been taken to not acknowledge that there was a territorial problem here on the moon, so they were given names that didn't evoke a specific country. Base One is directly below Station L1."

Station L1 would of course be that terminus station from before.

My rebound in flying from a dream into a robot was tremendous, so that was a location I could not properly be cognizant of.

"The moonside orbital elevator was set up in relation to the Lagrange point. Do you know about Lagrange points?"

"...were they not convenient points in space in between the moon and Earth?"

That was a shot in the dark of an answer that came from interpreting the flow of the conversation.

"Exactly."

...and I went and got it right.

"All details aside, it was the suitable place to locate the orbital elevator. Base One was built with L1 Station at its center. Base Two was built as a relay station towards Point L2, which is on the other side of the moon, near the moon's northern pole. City Seven here was made as a resource excavation city, so it was built in what's called the Tranquility Sea."

"And your Base Seven is connected via underground subway, correct?"

"It should be, but we're cut off from access to the power station. Moving via subway is likely impossible at present. Distance-wise it's not that far, but walking's out of the question."

"How are you off on air and all the important things?"

"Got a massive stockpile. There's no need to worry about anything. More importantly, right now you're infiltrating the network, are you?"

"...it would appear that I am in fact doing something of the sort."

"Thought so, given how we can have this conversation right now."

"What do you mean?"

"Well... anyway, there's no need for you to worry."

"And your companions?"

"Yeah, they're with me."

A prompt answer. I somehow felt that that closed off all related questions. I actually wanted to ask about the crash, among many other things, but it looked better to give up on that at present.

"...uhm, then, does it look like you can return to Earth?"

"And there it came, you're not telling me that's why you came all the way here?"

"It is. As I have established a route, I wish to come take you home via the space elevator."

"Can't do that."

"W-, why?"

"...there's been some trouble, sure, but now that we're safe, I don't want to waste this precious chance. I will stay here a little while, there's lots of things I want to research."

"But you cannot come back of your own strength, can you?"

"We didn't know about the orbital elevator. So we came to hassle ourselves by coming here via shuttle. One flight and the shuttle became useless, but to come back all we have to do is move to City One and use the elevator. Happily, this is a resource city. We can use as much titanium and oxygen and water as we please. Anything that's needed we can also reproduce. It would probably be possible for us to repair the shuttle, as well. Taking some time we can fix up even the power generation facility. There's people besides me that say that this is the time to take it slow and research."

"....."

Grandfather had said that with logicity.

"That's why I believe we'll stop here for a little longer. You didn't need to come."

So much logicity that something felt off.

"...Grandfather, you are not lying, are you?"

The signal cut off for a short while. In the first place, it was weird how he could communicate with me, as I was dwelling in a robot. That was because, at present, our exchange was performed entirely via sensors. Even if he had infiltrated the network, detecting me was quite some feat. Him being able to converse with me like this, I mean. What could that signify?

"...looks like the line is bad. I'll be contacting Earth soon, so for now go concentrate on your job. Neglecting your role of Substitute Chief's not acceptable."

"Grandfather!"

The conversation broke off. This felt like it was not an issue with the line, but like he had intentionally hung up.

At that point I had no more ways to obtain new information.

In the darkness, deep within a cold resin body, the only thing shaking hard was my heart. I indeed could only wait for my body to come to me so I could investigate the reality of the situation.

The fairies said that sending the body and having it come here would take a week. I could not quite remain in wait for that long.

I could really, really not bear this.

The way Grandfather spoke like it was all as usual utterly caught me. I had the feeling that he had instructed me not to come to the moon.

Normally, you would not call for family to yourself when you were in a dangerous location.

I activated a camera tagged *For Station Vistas Use* and it lit up. Raw images rushed in, ones that were not from the robot's memory.

On the wall before me there was a scribbled graffiti that said, *the moon is Heaven!*.

...I see. That was sarcastic.

What they meant to say was the opposite.

Even with all these facilities neatly provided, a life on the surface of the moon had to be one of many difficulties, I supposed.

And in the end, now that humanity had declined, the moon had been abandoned and left to become a ruin.

"...I have to go back."

I could tell that a switch had been flipped within me.

It was the switch that made me hurry to action whenever, and it flipped at the end of all ends, whenever I was truly in danger, when I could not rely on anything, not even the power of the fairies.

It was proof that a situation of true danger had arisen.

My consciousness was enveloped in a sandstorm.

...when I opened my eyes, the strongest thing I felt was a smell.

They were the smell of the sea and of air and of plants. The hardest elements to evoke for a dream or an illusion. This time, rather than the consciousness, it was my body that felt certain that I had returned to reality.

"My eyes hurt..."

The strength and sharpness of the visible light rushing into my eyes was as if stabbing them. Tears seeped into my dried eyes, and I could not quite close them. However, that pain was, at present, pleasant. Fully immersed in the cold and calm awareness of the robot as I was, I learned what a harsh storm of interference a human body's sensations were. And all humans lived there, in the midst of that storm.

How the light that so pierced my eyes was the faint color of honey made me notice that quite some time had passed.

"So it is twilight..."

Despite that it was not really cold, the climate was warm. Just as if the season had changed while I was asleep...

My eyes got used to the inundation of light at last. What came rushing in was the location, which was that of a southern country where there was a lush vegetation of plants that I did not remember ever seeing before.

But what startled me the most was what was towering amid the tall trees.

Initially I was struck by the illusion that it was an even more massive tree. Color was a marble-like white, shining unvarnished by the scarlet surrounding it, and it extended upwards towards the sky without end in sight. How it was a building despite seeming somewhat like a plant was due to association with its shape, which was that of an upside-down lily.

"What was it now? Lili-... lili-something."

I was in my flesh-and-blood body, so I was not quite sure of my memories, but, in short, it was *that* thing. The Earth station of the space elevator that, far in the past, a king of a southern country created by borrowing the power of a proto-fairy.

I was standing on a land far in the south.

How? When? Why?

At the very least, from what I could see in the dream, I was still in the Village, however.

Met with a mismatch in my awareness so wide it was almost thrilling, I passed my gaze on my surroundings in search of someone that could answer me.

As I did, I found a large crowd of people collapsed around me. Whatever the reason, it looked like they were dead.

"We're not dead!"

One of the bodies suddenly lifted up. It was Y.

"That is a relief."

"Don't say it so calmly... you whipped us to the bones to get here..."

Whipped to the bones?



"I do not remember any of that, however."

"...if you mean that as a joke then make sure we can tell that it's a joke. Yeah, we've been fast asleep for half a day, looks like... work really struck us hard."

This from a person who was never struck hard when it came to her hobbies.

"Ngggh... I don't want to work anymore..." "I'm dying..." "Feels like I've worked a lifetime's worth..." "I don't want to work in high places anymore..."

The other collapsed people were also alive... or rather, they were only sleeping. They had tanned skins, the rough style of the present country. Maybe they were natives of this land?

"Who would these people be?"

"I said, give it a break with the tedious jokes."

"That was no joke."

"...huh?"

Y gazed at my face with furrowed brows. Then went *hah!* as she inhaled sharply.

"Your brows... they're thin!"

"Well, my brows are normally thin...?"

"Nah, for the last while they'd been thick. Are you back to normal?"

"I am telling you that brows do not grow thicker in just a little time!"

"They totally did! Do you really remember nothing?"

"Ah."

While I was doing my search I left my body to the fairies. This all happened in that while, there was no mistake.

"...how was I like?"

I fearfully inquired, and she said I had been acting weird since the instant we returned home from that voyage in the dream world with the VIP Boss.

"It was like you was a totally different person. Different, but just on the inside... right, to compare, you were like that mysterious first-rate assassin, a machine-like man. And most importantly, you had thick brows."

"I told you that eyebrows do not just grow thicker."

"...guess so. Still, assuming there was a significant change inside you, then that different mind would have turned your face into somebody else's, that's something I actually hear a lot. And that's what happened to you."

I tried touching my eyebrows. ...normal. All too normal.

"To put it in a way that's easy to understand, you had man-ified."

"That is difficult to understand, you know."

"That aside, you started acting soon after waking up from the dream. You gathered a ton of sweets of various types, you used those as bait to get the fairies mobilized, and built a papercraft helicopter."

I was more energetic than what one could imagine from seeing me on the day-by-day basis, Y said.

Simultaneously I also gathered information, even requested the cooperation of the Boss on several things, made travel arrangements, and quickly departed, so I was told.

"You even got one of those guns that you normally never even touch."

That gun was presently hoisted around my shoulder.

"First, you went to the launch facility. The project had failed so they let the team go, but since one of them remained behind on the island as representative, you threatened him and stole the project's documents. Then, without so much as a break, you flew right to this island, and this time you tricked the natives, who had no fault to them, into doing hard labor..."

"W-, what for?"

"You said that human hands were also needed to make that thing work again."

She pointed at the inverted white lily.

Gazed at from here, it looked like a white peak stuck in the middle of a jungle.

Fixing that massive thing would definitely take human hands.

"...I see, so the island now has this much green growing on it."

In the past it was an artificial island without a single blade of grass on it, but as many long years passed, fertile earth had sedimented and trees grew richly, turning this into a luscious, verdant island.

"And the fairies?"

"I think you had them fix that tether, that fishing line over there. That looks like it goes up for several dozens of thousands of kilometers in the sky, you know... you ordered them, and up they clambered, they did..."

"That ground facility is our holy land, so to ensure nothing strange was being done to it we climbed to watch things over, but for some reason we were made to help..."

The dark-skinned elder came by to say that.

"And you would be?"

"The chief of a tribe of islanders that you tricked and put to hard work."

"Well then, now then. Thank you very much for your hard work."

"...you feel different now. What happened to your brows?"

What mess did my eyebrows put myself in, I had to know.

"Well, my sincerest apologies for how my personal issues got you to work so hard."

"Nah, you helped us, too... we just wanted to pay you an appropriate price."

"How would I have helped you all?"

"As price for their labor you fixed a clean water production facility underneath the island that had broken down, you fixed an equally damaged 3D printing device, and you beat down the legendary great shark that was terrorizing the area."

Y added that.

"Was that by borrowing the powers of the fairies?"

"Nope. All three of those things you did by yourself. I did help, more or less, but... where did you get skills and knowledge like those, I wanna know? Also, you got good with guns. When you fired, you didn't miss once. If you put your mind to it, you could kill as many people as you'd like. That's amazing."

"Being praised with those words does not make me happy!"

...my body had been doing all that while my mind had leaped into the moon, that was startling.

"And thanks to you, life on this island has become a little easier."

In short, I used all the skills at my command to repair the space elevator, huh. I see~.

"Well, the facility required water and parts to be repaired, so as far as results go, it's not like you've done all this for virtue's sake."

The tribe leader continued his words with a face that was not fully satisfied.

Me oh my, the world was that kind of place, indeed.

"All that aside, now that repairs have safely finished, and your personality seems to have gone back to how it was... 'Ei!'"

Y stole my gun.

When it came to guns I was the what-is-that-I-am-scared type, so I did not miss it at all when I had mine taken away. And as I was stating that out loud, Y pointed the muzzle at me.

"Face the tree and raise your hands."

"How mean! Pointing a gun at a friend, I cannot believe this! I am going to sue you!"

"In what court?"

"Some court somewhere..."

※ courts of law did not exist in the present Earth.

"Enough of that, put your hands there."

I did as told. Y completely confiscated from my various pockets the Rounded-Up fairies I held as precaution and all the Fairy Tools that I had brought over from the Village.

"Your thick-eyebrowed self could jump off a building and land without being hurt, punch burly men flying like it was nothing, escape from an exploding base with acrobatics, infer conspiracies involving you before they start, pathologically disliked people standing behind you, and managed to yank a rampaging shark on land using a rope, so I really never wanted to go against that version of you, but now it's an easy victory."



"...were all those adventures I had?"

And better yet I was not injured, hard to believe.

The Fairy Power of Service was certainly something, but humanity's latent abilities were also impressive.

"There you go, weapon confiscation complete."

"I feel dejected."

"Also, sorry, but you're not going to the moon."

"What, why? The repairs are done, are they not?"

"Even given that, we can't guarantee it'll be safe. Even Assistant-kun requested me to take you back home... also, well, there's lots of other stuff."

Her words were oddly vague.

"Lots of other what?"

"Lots of lots of other things. See, while you're gone, the job becomes a real pain to deal with. You know that's true, don't you?"

"Ah, that was the reason why you... please try saying something more convincing."

"How? Besides, even if going to the moon itself is safe, the moon itself might not be necessarily safe. It'd be more constructive to think that the boss lives on within our hearts."

"That way of putting it is much too clean and not to my liking, however..."

"Regardless, the moon voyage is canceled. Let's go back to the Village. There's a mountain of work waiting for us."

When I looked at her face, and how she was trying to forcibly end the discussion, I saw that she was no longer in the mood for detailed questioning.

"...OK. I will not resist this. Let us go back to the Village."

"I like you when you're not protesting. I'm sorry about the boss, but it's better to stick close to human lands and stay alive, see."

"I too would not travel thirty-eight thousand kilometers for my own enjoyment."

"Then let's wait for the fairies to come back and return via chopper. For tonight, let's say you're under house arrest."

That night I was shoved in the same room as Y.

"Zzz..."

However, Y fell promptly asleep. A deep sleep, like she had stocked up on the fatigue of rushing to all those repair works!

"...you always botch the endgame."

Making sure not to wake her I slowly opened the window and called out at a low voice.

"You there?"

"Yeee-es!" "We're back!" "We put the elements back together!" "We can go annietime!"

The fairies hopped on the windowsill and reported that repairs were done without incident.

"Is the elevator working?"

"Wanna go?"

"Yes, let us go. Make sure we are not spotted."

I went to the entrance and discovered a thin fiber wire stretched underfoot. It was built so that going to the entrance without caution would catch your feet and ring a bell. Y had to have set it up, how impudent of her.

I quietly took just my shoes and calmly escaped via the window.

"...according to my fuzzier memories, I am sure that I had prepared a rucksack..."

The rucksack stuffed with the equipment for travel to the moon was waiting in the cottage set aside for my personal use.

Contents were light-weight and long-lasting foodstuffs (sweets included), PocMon, and her charging base.

That was about it. It appeared that I had anticipated on-site procurement of materials, so I had not prepared anything beyond the minimum necessary.

There ought to be a stockpile of materials in the relay station in earth orbit, so the plan went that I would secure it in case it was needed.

There were of course no faults to be found in my fully-awakened self.

I changed in clothes easier to move into and shouldered the rucksack.

I left the cottage and saw no indication that anyone was following me. I had completely eluded Y. And the residents of the island all seemed to be asleep as well.

I blended into the shadows of the night and began moving towards the inverted lily.

Being a small island, I arrived there in about ten minutes.

The construction of the inverted lily was strikingly similar to that of a train station platform.

There were a number of lines and trains that had stopped a little short of the end.

"I hope the tether is working..."

It needed to carry all this weight outside of Earth. As a passenger, I could not help being struck by an instinctive fear.

"The strings feel fine, you know?" "There's lots of them!" "Even if one snaps, the others will support you!" "Past humans really got it done!"

The fairies were repeatedly stamping their approval on this.

"This is the tether you people made."

"Really?" "Was it?" "Not like we remember it!"

First, to the control room.

I checked that it was receiving electrical power from the nearest ocean current power generation facility. As expected, all as expected.

"I will entrust control of the elevator to you."

"Awww, you're asking the impossible!"

I absolutely needed to leave someone in the control room. PocMon was the most suitable. However, her complaints were to write home about.

"Look, I even have your charging base. You only need to do an easy job while charging up."

"But operating this is something anyone can do~?"

"Fairies cannot do real-time support in the event of an emergency. Besides, someone might set foot inside here, so ensure that the electronic lock is engaged until I have returned, if you please."

"...fiii-ine. Still, this is a well done system, isn't it."

"You can tell?"

"It's in short a system designed to preserve the integrity of the tether, but the safeties are of an impressively high level. Normally, space-related technologies have had their waste whittled away until the very core, but on the opposite, this was made to ensure there is plenty of room to work with, you see. It's proof that the design groundwork had that same room to work with. It's been designed so that, whatever the altitude the cabin drops from, the passengers can be rescued... to be honest, this might be the most amazing piece of technology I've ever seen."

As someone with the need to go to space clung to that tether, those were the most reassuring words I could hear.

"Please make sure to monitor me so that we can contact each other at any time, all right?"

"Fine, fine. Leave it all to me. It doesn't seem like there's anything wrong with the system, but be careful anyway."

"Also make sure to not forget to charge yourself."

"It's aaall right on that side. EEK! I discovered an unknown archive!"

...I was glad to see that she was having fun.

I left the control room and the door behind me locked electronically. Good.

I climbed onto a passenger car.

The shape was that of a somewhat short-ish train. Inside it was actually quite different from one.

On top of the route becoming vertical partway through it had to handle situations of no gravity or inversion between ground and sky, so the passenger seating area as a whole was capable of rotating the whole way around.

Also, as far as I had investigated, the passenger car was equipped with the bare minimum attitude adjustment devices, meaning one could go from the Earth-side high-orbit station to the moon-side orbital station without needing to change cars. In short, although it had no propulsion systems, it was something of a spaceship. It was truly a space train on a galactic railway.

If one thought an unseen orbital track as a single path, then one may also think of the Earth and the moon being connected by a single line.

The memories from when my latent potential was unleashed came back as if seeping through. As I had fully memorized the manual of this train car, I could more or less manage to fly it. However, my memorization faculties had returned to normal, so I forgot things here and there...

Well, typically there was no need to pilot this thing, so it was fine.

"The train has a single passenger carriage... and it should have a power generation car ready, I suppose."

There was nothing else I wanted to carry to space at this point. I had already brought with me long-lasting water and foodstuff. I could not prepare many sweets, and at present I only had the ones in my rucksack left, so that was a source of some unease.

After all, sweets were fuel for the fairies.

"Fairies, I understand that something fun is happening, but please make sure not to multiply too much, all right? I do not have that many sweets."

"Don't talk like it's so complicated!" "Round Up?" "Round right Up?"

I secured myself in the seat. There were no doors leading through to other cars like there were on normal trains. That was because the cars were not connected to each other. After all, the wall behind my back was going to become the floor during vertical operation.

At the seat there was a communication device, one which I believed originally connect to the operators.

"Hello?"

"Here I am, here I am! Have you fastened your seatbelt?"

Right now, it was a direct line into the control room.

"Of course, you may go at any time."

"I got good news."

"Eh, what?"

"Y-san has woken up and has been pounding really hard on the door."

"What of that is good news?"

"Well, she gave up and is coming over to you."

"And again, what part of that is good news?"

"You can see her howling mug from across the window, you see?"

"...hum, no?"

Did PocMon actually have a copy of my own personality...

The carriage's doors closed automatically. The airtight seals, the weight, and whether everything inside was fastened down was checked, then the warning light in front changed from red to green. It appeared there were no issues.

*"To all the passengers on the International Vertical Line, please be aware that departure will be in one minute. This is to caution you not to leave your seats. Due to weather, turbulences, and other causes, it is unlikely but possible that the carriage could shake hard. Please fasten your seatbelts. At low altitudes, your seats also function as an emergency evacuation unit. Please fasten your seatbelts. We will be departing momentarily. Please enjoy your voyage from earth to space."*

I lent ear to the vintage announcement from the time when this was first put into operation, then found Y rushing over from outside of the window.

She smacked the window hard and shouted but I could abbbbsolutely not hear anything.

I smiled brightly and waved her my hand.

She jotted down something on a piece of paper and showed it to me.



"Idiot!"

"....."

Bad mood, I see, huh.

It felt like it was the first time in a long while that I had seen her so frantic.

...absurd, would that mean she was really worried about my safety?

If she was, then what should I do?

The carriage began moving.

Y followed with her 'idiot' sign held up. This would have been a famous scene if she had written something moving like, *"we will be friends forever! (tears)"*.

I wanted to reply, but I had no paper, so it was impossible.

Eventually the carriage followed the inverted lily's internal wall and began ascending in a spiral, passing through a vertical tunnel. From the window, now tilted at a slight angle, I could command a view of everything below.

Right underneath there was the inverted lily, the island covered by green, and a view of the



ocean shining at the first light of dawn.

"Fairies, come on, look. Being able to make this a reality, truly, even humans can be quite the thing."

"Humans were always quite the thing, however?" "Are you making fun of humanity?"

"Humans have come here by punching through all sorts of living creatures, they're the strongest!"

That was negative criticism. Might making right, might being truth, nothing else. It was the defeat of reason, nothing else. I came to fall deep into philosophical discourses despite the magnificent vista before me.

The estimated time of arrival to the next station we were scheduled to stop at was displayed on a panel installed before my seat.

The elevator's route was nearly a line, however it had plenty of stations.

The majority were supply and business-use areas, but the main locations were the following five:

Low-earth orbit station – geostationary station – spaceport – lunar station – front of the lunar surface base

Local trains and special expresses would stop at those stations, however what I was riding on was considered an express train, so it would not stop until the terminus.

Time to terminus was estimated at one hundred twelve hours. Nearly five days.

It would take that long a time to ride through a distance to the moon of three hundred and eighty thousand kilometers. By the way, one lap around the Earth was forty thousand kilometers, I believed. An impressive distance. Five days was some excursion of a voyage, however.

Was it a long trip, was it a short trip, I could no longer tell, you see.

I had an urge that said I should feel the haste and want to arrive as early as possible, but my present self was certain that what I was doing was acting as fast as possible. All that remained was to wait to arrive.

"...and so I went."

Should I perhaps have brought everybody else to help?

But it was dangerous, and since it involved a relative of mine, I had no choice but to go off on my own.

I did whip people to the bone when it came to repairing the elevator, but that was me being as reliant on others as I could be.

The acceleration was slow, so I could not feel anything strong pushing me down into the seat. And still the ground vanished from sight in the blink of an eye, while the sky became dark and vividly clear.

The shutter closed down on the window and I could no longer gaze directly at what laid outside. In its stead I could freely watch the video of the camera outside the carriage.

What it showed was the carriage I was riding on smoothly climbing on a tower made up of countless tethers that looked like a cat's cradle.

There should have been a fair bit of acceleration, however I could nearly not feel anything on my body.

This rail structured as a cat's cradle of countless tethers was utterly resistant to shaking, and it was pleasant to ride.

While the train was being repaired we had lightened the weight by removing unnecessary

passenger seats. In their stead, we put partition boards and loaded it with water and other materials, so as far as the space went, it was cramped.

The seat was held in place by an axle throughout its width, a mechanism that allowed one to put their feet to the floor even when up and down were reversed.

The train ran vertically and could be used as a space shuttle, but as up and down were not a constant certainty, this trick prevented the danger of things falling.

The seat could also be collapsed and turned into a bed.

I decided to tip off the back and lay down.

It was less than ten hours to the spaceport. I fell asleep, I woke up, and was in space.

*"We will be decelerating soon. You will experience a temporary heavy weight, so please be careful. We will be decelerating soon."*

I was woken up by something with quite the strong intonation of a warning.

"Oh..."

My bodily sensations had changed and I was startled. My weight had decreased a fair bit.

Getting away from Earth meant gravity was reduced.

Thanks to my seatbelt I was not floating, but the fairies were helplessly and slowly floating about.

What I saw of the interior of the carriage had also changed. This was because the seats had automatically tilted and adjusted themselves. As a part of the floor had fixed itself together with the seat, I had no trouble finding out where to plant my feet.

"Good morning, fairies."

"G'mo!" "Guh'mo!" "Gung'ho!"

"Is that fun?"

"Not at all!" "Earth felt better!" "More than weightless, we're powerless!"

"I s-, see... well, you must not feel right without the ability to put your feet to the ground."

As the announcement said, deceleration had begun. I had a feeling like gravity had been restored. My head and organs felt nice and pressured upon. The seat, gripping powerfully to the axle, pointed its bottom in the direction of what I experienced as down.

"Woah!" "We're falling" "We're being tossed about!"

The fairies all fell down. They bumped and hopped about the carriage, screaming all *EEK!*, *EEK!*.

It appeared that, having moved up with the space elevator, we were at present located well past the middle point.

Spaceport, went the name of the station.

This was a disk-shaped large-scale station where the space shuttle was fired off in the trajectory towards the moon, where flights from the moon would be docking at, and it was also a parking lot and a garage, it even had business facilities.

I examined the image and found that it was actually something like several massive, overlapping disks.

"Fairies, we are at a space station!"

The fairies stared hard at the image.

"Looks like there's not many master humans there?"

"There would not be a single one."

"Baaad!" "I'm beat!" "Should we Round Up?"

The more fairies grew distant from the world of mankind the less inspired they became.

"You know what, the more master humans there are the better?" "Could you increase in

number?"

"...our increase in numbers complicates things a fair bit. And we cannot subdivide like you folks can."

"So we see!"

And while we were doing all that, the announcement played back.

*"This train will momentarily shift into the track with the moon as destination. There will be no stops. As the arrival at the lunar station will occur in seventy hours, in the sole case of emergencies, such as feeling altered physical conditions, please inform us via the alighting buzzer next to you. This train will momentarily..."*

If I wanted to go back, this was the final moment.

Once the shift happened, there was no possible way for the line to make an U-turn on its own power.

However much science advanced, there was no way of helping anyone who suddenly fell ill during the time in which one drifted between the Earth and the moon.

And that was why I felt, *oh dear, this is scary*.

I of course could not simply sleep for three days.

With the screen equipped to the seat one could read, play games, move the exterior camera, all things to ward off boredom, but once I started a chess program PocMon came out with a challenge, except losing every game of course made me feel like, well, not wanting to talk to her for a while.

Food was produced by EGO and carried in.

EGO was a built-in system said to be popular from the start of the period of decline onwards.

It was from the production line (mini-factory) that could make anything by combining resin-built blocks. It was targeted at special, small-scale production.

It had been excavated in large quantities the world over, so it was used here and there even now.

We were weightless, therefore I drank the soup from a package and ate sandwiches. The bread scattered an odd dust around, but the air circulation caught it, so there was no issue.

Tea time was necessary even in space.

I had tightly-sealed tea and morsel-sized sweets.

The fairies approached, smelling the sweet scent of konpeitos.

"Wann'it!" "It's tea time!" "I would like to have it!"

"Fine, fine."

"Mood feels good!"

They stuffed their cheeks with konpeitos and *phew*, they flew about.

The fairies had, at present, invented a technology with which to freely fly about the interior of the carriage, and they now carried something like mini-air tanks on their backs. They pumped in air and compressed it using a handle, and used jets to fly about. It seemed kind of fun. As an aside, the air tank themselves were made of empty hairspray cans.

Using the all too much time I had on my hand, I reviewed the data about the lunar facilities. I examined the map of the interior of the base, of course, but also of the location of customer facilities and the status of the stockpiles of goods. I borrowed the carriage's terminal and downloaded all of that. As a study guide.

Showers were quite the special devices, they were coffin-shaped devices that one could enter and bathe in the water. You could leave even the drying up to them. As one's head jutted out, face washing and hair cleaning were necessarily separate. Sort of annoying. It still was

dramatically better equipment than the Rocket Age (where they seemingly went without showering).

Exercise. Muscle strength sapped due to being in a no-gravity situation. Therefore, one-two hours a day of exercise were a requirement. An annoyance, but I did my best.

In this third day I had become significantly more used to a weightless environment.

I could say that I had a fair bit of practice with how to move. I believed I would have been utterly helpless if thrown into zero gravity, but there were many ways to change my posture, and as far as moving about in a cramped environment went, it presented no inconveniences. The sole and only annoyance was dealing with the hair.

With nearly no gravity the hair on my head spread wide in every direction, it got annoying enough that I was seriously considering cutting it short, but I suddenly remembered to put my fight into it and it quickly went back to how it was, and it had been all ease from then onwards. Now that I say it, an event happened at some point that gave my body the ability to do that, it did. I had forgotten. How it had not disappeared was a surprise, regardless I wished to remain human for all my time.

*"We will soon arrive at the lunar elevator. After docking there will be acceleration, so please take your seats and fasten your seatbelts."*

"We're there?"

"It looks like we are there, indeed. You guys also have to clamp yourselves down somewhere."

"I'm fine!" "I wanna be pushed down!" "Exciting bodily sensations?"

How perverted...

Via the camera outside the carriage I could tell that the tip of the lunar-side elevator looked like it was being sucked in towards us.

As the carriage began sliding on the lunar-side tether there was acceleration, and for the first time in some while I savored the feeling of my body being pushed on.

"AhKyah!" "Piii!" "Attractiooon!"

The fairies were as usual frolicking around, looking amused.

By the way, because we were accelerating towards the face of the moon, I could plant my feet upside down. Still laying down on the seat as I was, I was withstanding a bizarre bodily sensation.

The lunar elevator was going to take a while, all of one day and a half, to arrive to the terminus that was the front of the lunar base.

*"Final stop, front of lunar base. Final stop, front of lunar base. Please make sure to take all your luggage and not forget anything behind. Thanks Berry Much for using the International Vertical Line on this day, but note that I can't manage anything past the control room, so once you get inside the base plee-ease contact me. Do note that while there's air at the platform, I can't monitor anything past that, so it might be in vacuum. Please wear that space suit you brought with, all righty!"*

PocMon's message came to me as a simulated announcement.

"Now then, I suppose I will get changed and start searching for Grandfather."

"Excuse me, master huuuman!"

The fairy had a gloomy face.

"One of us has deserted!"

"Ngh, as expected."

There were three activated fairies, but one of them had tumbled to the floor in Rounded Up form. This I did predict as likely to happen.

"Too much boredom, perhaps."

"As representative of that fellow, I will apologize!" "Apologize!"

"...there is nothing to be done about this."

I gave a morsel of biscuit to each of the remaining fairies.

"Got it!" "Dunno what that's for!"

The times during which they ate something delicious were, generally, the most fun times.

That being said, I had consumed quite the amount during the voyage to here. In the beginning all three were Rounded Up, possibly for preservation. But as their divine protection weakened, I became hesitant, you see. That was due to how I thought the space between Earth and moon to be the most dangerous part of the voyage.

I sure hope that they last until the end, however...

Now then, the space suit. I was not sure I could procure one in situ, so I made a patchwork of those preserved in the inverted lily and brought that with me. It was the slim fishbowl-type.

Though not in need of one, the fairies were wearing similar fishbowl-style space suits.

The train had stopped vertically, so it was built with an exit up top that was connected to the floor via a spiral staircase. The scene was like that of a staircase making spiral figures within the train.

I had been sitting on the seat furthest in the back as seen from the direction of motion, so now I could leave from exactly the highest location. Clap, clap, I climbed the staircase and alighted on the platform.

I happened to glance at my feet and found fairies making some sort of gesture with their whole bodies.

We were in a vacuum, so I could not converse with the fairies.

I decided to carry them on my shoulders.

"I couldn't read the atmosphere!" "There's no atmosphere to read, see?"

"None, is there..."

Bumping helmets together made vibrations cross, making conversation possible.

"Not needing to read the atmosphere, is this heaven?"

"It is actually closer to Hell."

"...I just can't win at this!"

The world, including the moon, felt just like that.

When I flew here from the dream there was some confusion with regards to visual information, however, at present this was the clear and realistic figure of a train platform.

Tight and cramped, it had no space for a family to hug. It was blunt and curt like it was made to tell people to just move along already.

The vertical wagon had an intimidating air to it, and I quickly got my distance from it.

"Now then..."

Right then, a *woom-woom* of an strange vibration reached me from my feet.

I turned back and saw the elevator come off the tether, tearing the spiral staircase apart in many pieces as it sunk through the floor.

"....."

I was of course at a loss for words.

If I had not rushed away from it, then I would have been crushed under there...!

I gave my thanks to my survival instinct from the bottom of my heart.

"Ngh, is this... even repairable at all?"

A close inspection made it clear that the destruction was much more serious than I thought.

First, the lifelines, the group of tethers, was untouched.

However, this was in fact not quite good news. Even hundreds of the tethers having been severed was not impediment for operation, since one could operate a maintenance machine called a Climber up and down the lines to automatically repair them.

But the damage had reached the carriage itself.

The roller unit part, which held on to the tethers, had shattered.

This... could not be easily repaired.

The first thing that came to mind was to search for a different carriage to return from the moon.

But the lunar station was little more than a ruin, and so it felt like no trains would have remained behind. Even supposing there was one, there was a high probability that it would have aged into uselessness, and repairs would not be realistic...

"Fairies, can you fix this?"

The fairies were troubled.

"Not impossible?" "Needs sugar content?"

Sugar content... sweets. Fairies worked on sweets.

"I do have some, however..."

"About this much is about how much?" "Around one hundred and twenty konpeitos?"

I did bring a can of konpeitos. It was not like I had counted them, but one hundred and twenty... it looked like I did have. At present.

Just as I thought I had been prepared enough, there went the moon. It outdid even my safety-consciousness. I deeply regretted all of this. But I had made as many as I could, so there was nothing else to be done about it...

For now, proactively speaking, I believed that as long as I had sweets I could secure a way home.

"First of all, I must reactivate the power source... yes I do."

The platform was alone in having power. That was why it was lit up even now.

A mechanism made it so that that the potential energy of the space elevator going downwards would be converted into electrical power. Regenerative control, that was plausible, indeed.

Machines rich in potential energy were able to do that. Even among humans there were those that liked high places, and all of them were all too rich in vitality, you see. And those folks... they had to be generating electrical power.

The platform and its stand-alone-ness aside, I could not tell what was happening in the next room over.

I checked out the situation of the oxygen inside the base from a panel available there, and, as expected, the room was in vacuum.

There was either a hole somewhere, or this had been abandoned in a state of vacuum.

I opened the door with the emergency handle and stepped out into the vacuum area.

On top of not having atmosphere, it was pitch black. How mean. The light of my hand torch wrenched open an area that felt translucent, one that I could see clearly through all the way to the floating dust.

I headed straight to the energy distribution room. I had already memorized its location.

The utterly dark and cold base was creepy. The impression was remarkably different than what I had seen across the memories of the robot.

The walls were very dirty, and there were many pieces of scrap laying about around me.

There had to have been a fair bit of bustle when this place was abandoned. It was much more of a ruin than I thought.

I was a little uneasy as to whether Grandfather and his team were able to survive in a place

like this.

...they were all right, right?

Regardless, this was the perfect mood for an unknown alien life form to show up...

"Sorta like the Alien?"

"Please stop. You are adding something unneeded. Unless it is a pop culture reference, then I accept it."

"If only it was popcorn!"

And as we chatted about nothing we arrived at the power distribution room. There was that one robot nearby, its functions stopped.

"Ahhh, the robot?" "The robot is dead again!"

"The robot has fulfilled its important role. I would like to leave it be."

I gave him a silent prayer.

That being said, I had linked from the dream all the way to here... from dream to mind to computer memory. My personal memory log also connected, though in different ways, right? This felt simply put odd.

I entered the power distribution room and went referencing the terminals as I busied to restore power.

"This is a relief. The power generation facility is still working."

Being on the moon, there were solar-light-powered generation facilities set up here and there. I began supplying power. All the machinery throughout the base revived, and the parts of the control panel's display that were bright red gradually changed into green. Not long and even the power distribution room's ceiling lit up, the strong light instantly chasing away the darkness.

A breath of relief. Safety was confirmed. Hopefully the Adventure was with this done.

A message window opened on the power distribution room's display panel.

*"Thanks berry much! It appears that the first base had been deprived of air in order to preserve the past. There was one final log. Getting into the system was real easy, so I restarted the pumping of air, all right!"*

PocMon, who had been created in order to collect data from every age, was a genius cracker that could get into whatever system, no matter how it was built.

"P'shuuu!" "P'shuRuRuRuRuuu!"

...could they be talking like that because this was effective even on fairies?

It took time for the base to fill with air.

I had no reason to wait for that, so I decided to keep going forwards.

At the center of the base was that circular hall, and the underground train system had been built below that. I opened the emergency shutter and descended down a wide staircase.

"Third floor underground?" "About time for the miniboss?"

"If one appeared we would wipe, you know?"

I had not brought even a single weapon.

The underground train system's platform had, conveniently, a single carriage train stopped at it.

"Good. Looks like there are no issues."

An untrained eye could not glimpse any significant issue with the train's body. Well, it was probably well-preserved within the vacuum.

Here and there, the underground network had human-powered trolleys for emergency use and oxygen distribution facilities, so in the unlikely event that I got stuck, I would not be

overtly troubled. I could try it without worries.

I tried setting up a voyage that headed to Base Seven, specifically its control room.

I had been messing around with so many devices in such a short time that my head felt about to explode.

"These days, among the jobs that came from the UN, the programming-type ones had increased, you know..."

"Uh-huh!"

"I only half-know about all that, however, meaning they really got their eyes on anyone who can do it. If that became my full time job it would be ohhh so painful..."

But that was only if I returned alive, do mind.

We had reached this point by continuous curtailment of organizations in the first place, so increasing my workload at this point would put it beyond my ability to cope with. Humanity ought take its responsibility and continue its decline, if it would please.

"...is the analysis still going?"

I had PocMon assist with the analysis of the system, but there seemed to be a transmission lag between Earth and moon, so replies were not quite brisk to come in.

"Hummm, it should be a similar travel system, but, yeeeah, the steering system is totally different from that of the elevator. Well... this goes like this, that goes like that... hummm, I thought I could control them in a batch, but I can't find them..."

"There is a paper manual, if you want it? It is an employee's manual, nothing less. Lessee, lessee... a newbie brushed against the skin of a senpai when leaving the company fifteen minutes ago... I apologize, this is useless garbage."

"Not using the trolley?" "I wanna make it go squeak-squeak!"

"Do you have any idea of how many kilometers there are to my destination?"

After going through everything with difficulty, we at last settled on the manual mode setting.

For the time being, we were going to be able to move the train across the railway with that.

Unnecessary automatisms would invite unforeseen trouble and therefore got nixed across the board.

"Seems that only humans can read the operation manual, so there's nothing of that inside the system. Was there anything on your side?"

"No, there was nothing of the sort..."

"I traced back the history and didn't find a single instance of manual activation, see. It's a possibility that it was left there without anyone knowing about it."

"...a lost technology? Or maybe a lost technique?"

"I think that maybe you'll be able to control it instinctively, you know? There's no passengers, how about trying to wing it?"

We had PocMon here uttering a *wing it* that was so very unlikely its being a machine intelligence.

Still, well, it was as she said.

"...let us try."

"Whoopsie and daisy!" "What else, even with thin eyebrows the master human can do it!"

There were quite the number of levers in the pilot's seat.

"....."

"Metro Let's Go!"

You tell me 'go', but, well...

I messed around with them with a *wing it* nuance and, unbelievably, a heavy vibration reached me from underfoot and the train began moving.



"It moved, huh!"

...however, at that point in time I did not know how to stop the train. I hated this sort of unplanned, haphazard adventures.

It took around three hours to reach Base Seven.

I of course had tried all sorts of things in that time, so I had become familiar with the basics of operation.

...it was tiring, however, do mind.

Now then, Base Seven.

Since Grandfather was there it would not have been odd if there had been air, but my expectations were betrayed. It was not pressurized.

Electricity had not been reinstated either, it was pitch black. The temperature was below freezing, so there was as expectable a need to restore the environment in order to search for someone.

I claimed electricity in the same way I did for Base One, simultaneously activating the oxygen production device.

Restoring the environment completely would have taken too much time, so I decided to selectively reactivate public spaces such as passageways and the great hall. It would still take a fair bit of time for electrical systems to come back online, air to be pumped in, and the effect of heaters to start being felt, so I decided to have a rest at an air shelter for emergency evacuation use.

That was a small room, so it was quickly restored to the same livable environment as the Earth surface.

I was able to take off my helmet for the first time in a few hours.

"Sigh, air is so delicious..."

Though I was resolved to it, being jostled about by every fresh bit of trouble made me exhausted.

Let us foster willpower with the tea from the thermos bottle and the sweets I had with me.

I split them with the fairies and noticed that they had decreased by one.

"Huh? Where is the other one?"

"...looks like it wasn't fun enough."

The lone remaining fairy held in his arms his friend who had turned into a sphere.

"We have been investigating all this time... not inexplicable, I suppose."

I recovered the Rounded Up fairy.

"Honorability: none!"

One of them remained. The moon, as should have been expectable, had no mercy. There was however how, given the remaining amount of sweets, having just one of them was to be thankful for.

It was possible that fairies would not quite increase in an environment with few humans.

That worried me a little.

Fire, too, was problematic in its first lighting, but keeping it going was not that much of an issue.

"Mister fairy, shall we set some rules?"

"Fun ones?"

This was the one that earlier talked about bosses and all that.

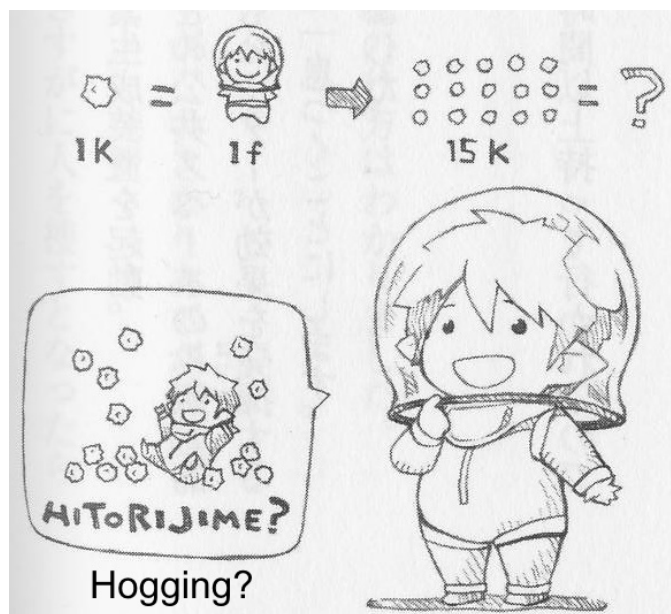
Let us go for a game-like system...

"Whenever you help me once, I will give you one konpeito."

"Truly?"

"One per each fairy. So if I had fifteen of them?"

"...hogging?"



"Let us dispense with selfishness. Let us achieve enlightenment."

"You talk hard stuff!"

"If I give fifteen konpeitos, then fifteen of you have to appear."

"That's true in theory?"

"And if you were to do as told..."

"I-, if we were?"

"Then as a special just for you I will give you a konpeito here and now. Also, as a special offer I will add the last chocolate coin I have left over."

"...as a special offer?"

"It is advance distribution, you see. Do not miss this opportunity!"

"I am not missing that bus!"

Cutesy round eyes shone as they wet with tears.

"So, may I request this of you?"

"I'm signing that contract without reading it!"

The fairy took the chocolate coin and the konpeito, hopped off of my shoulder, took off from who knows where scissors and a glue stick, and began crafting.

With hand motions that felt fast-forwarded the Tool was created in the space of a heartbeat.

"What is that?"

"A chocsure box!"

A (chocolate) treasure box.

As far as shape, it was a backpack with a hose extending from it, itself tipped with a large bugle-style nozzle. The design was that of a vacuum and a phonograph combined together.

"Sweets!"

The fairy pointed the bugle part at me. An invisible suction force came into being and slurp-urp-urped the fairies from the cracks of my Fairy Holder (a box I had made to hold fairies in

their Rounded Up state).

"I see, you are cultivating the fairies using that box on your back."

"Throw 'em at me at any time!"

As requested I could toss the konpeitos and he would summon fairies in proportion to their number.

With this I could efficiently use the power of the fairies... or could I?

Shlop, went the sound right behind my back, and out of character I tossed out an "eek!". I investigated what it had been, and found that the tube for water cooling on my space suit had ruptured.

Besides recovering the wearer's sweat, the cooling water tube percolated it, circulating it all through the body and thus smoothly sorting out the problem of excess heat. In a pinch, one could even drink it. As the space suit was tight-fitted, it had several points that one had to pay attention to. In space, where one could not expect thermoregulation by way of vaporized sweat, that was an especially important part.

As seen so far, humanity's materials engineering in its later stages had advanced leaps and bounds via proto-fairy magic, but although this tube was an example of such, it could not escape the effect of aging.

The passage of time was to be feared.

...it was lucky that it did not rupture during EVA. I was glad that it had broken at this point in time. It was really lucky.

"I have to fix this..."

"Does it look like you can exert yourself?"

The fairy looked up at me with eyes full of expectation.

"...may I entrust you with the repairs?"

"That will be a threepeitos!"

I tossed him three konpeitos. They unhurriedly fell down in low gravity, and were sweetly sucked in by the treasure box's bugle before they fell to the floor.

And then, the next instant, two fairies were *pang-pang* fired off from the trumpet.

"Do we do it?" "Were we done?" "Do we get it done?"

It appeared they were ready to get to work.

The three lifted up thread and needle and fixed the spacesuit at tremendous speed. Being airtight was important, despite that I saw that they were working it with a thread, hopefully it was going to be all right.

"Finished?" "Finished?" "Finished?"

"Good job. Thank you."

"Sai'nara!" "Till some other day!" "Gudbai!"

The fairies who had increased due to the konpeitos *puff*, vanished as soon as their role was fulfilled.

"Huuuh, this is convenient."

"I would like my reward!"

The repaired tube had been fixed to the point I could not tell where it had been mended. It was likely bonded at the molecular level. Just like magic.

"Nothing less from our fairies. As a reward, I will give you the Earth."

"But you're more important, master human?"

Though they had much more impressive powers than a human, fairies were always humble.

And as we were doing all that, the light that indicated that the air pressure within the base had

reached one atmosphere had turned on.

This was the beginning of the search. It was nice and easy to walk around with the helmet off.

"Grandfatheer, are you theeere?"

The construction of the bases was similar, there was only some difference in the partitioning. There was a hall in the center, and the residential areas, the management facilities, and all that were scattered about block by block. The size was smaller than Kusunoki Village's, so one base had two or three subway stations at most.

Though the construction was the same, the mood felt fairly different.

While Base One had many commercial facilities and show windows, this base had nearly nothing that stood out. Construction materials and tools were scattered about, and that gave this the impression of a job site.

"Grandfatheer, I have coome! I am at the great hall, let us meet in thirty minutes!"

I called out to the whole of the base's interior from a tiny communications room, and properly set down where I could sit at the main hall and waited.

"...h-, he is not coming."

Grandfather did not show up no matter how long I waited.

"Stood up?"

"...I might just have been..."

I repeated the announcement several times, but as thinkable, the person I was waiting for did not come.

Soon as I believed they had come from where the shuttle had made a crash landing and taken refuge in this base...

"Could he be shut inside some room? Or maybe there is a reason why he cannot move?"

I did not want to imagine too much of a bad thing, however no matter how hard I thought, my ideas did not head in a positive direction. The environment here was much too harsh for that.

"I wonder, is there not a function like a human locator?"

I returned to the air supply control center and investigated hard, but there was no such convenient functionality there.

In its stead I found what appeared to be a full-time monitor of air-tightness, and I wondered whether there was a history of what doors had been opened when.

"Sad to say that no records are left of which of the gates that connect to the exterior has been opened and when."

PocMon, who had made a system check, declared that through a public terminal.

"What, really? You are not mistaken?"

"Not mistaken at all. I have examined the system from corner to corner with the access privileges of the topmost class of the Lunar Exploration Project personnel."

"Well then, what other means of entry are there? Something like air vents..."

"There's no way there would be, is there. Anything that vents air is out. Ma'am, are you calm?"

"...I might not be."

Now that she said it, it was true. Anything that vented air was *ouch*.

"Coming or going from the outside requires an airlock. The airtight doors that are placed before and after an airlock are called gates. Gates are only placed in limited locations, they are strictly controlled and monitored with priority. Their records are all blank... ma'am, are you calm?"

"Then, at present time, there has been no one except us entering or leaving, is that what it means?"

So they were not on the base?

It felt like I had stated quite the cold fact.

"If I may say this frankly, the probability of your grandfather surviving is to despair about."

"....."

For a brief moment I could not breathe. Though there was air.

"Thinking about the number of days since the accident I can't really think that he survived outside of the bases. We have no trace of them entering inside a base at this point, so the chances of his survival are extremely small."

She spoke heavily and with an absence of emotion, as becoming of a machine intelligence. That said, even supposing she had said it with plenty of emotion, the fact would not have changed in any way. The anger with no outlet that instantaneously burst forth I let sink to the bottom of my heart in silence. I did not want to yell at anybody, but for some reason I wanted to see Assistant-san's face.

"...it is possible that they are alive within the shuttle. According to the flight plan, they were packing a living module."

"The possibility does exist. If there's enough in the shuttle that they might survive inside of it, if they secured equipment and power enough to survive the lunar temperature, if there are no fatal injuries among the other passengers, if the airtight seals keep... there is a variety of conditions that they need to satisfy first."

I understood... the odds were extremely low.

Was there no element around here that could raise that probability of survival?

"If only there was an older lunar base right near to the shuttle's crash landing site..."

"The probability that there just happened to be an usable facility located next to the crash landing point is literally astronomical, you know that?"

"....."

"...I have spoken out of place, ma'am."

Seeing me sink into silence for a while seemingly made her apologetic, as PocMon said that with a somewhat softer intonation.

"Ah, but the shuttle may have been equipped with lunar bikes or somesuch, and as long as they had the capacity for long distance travel, things change a little bit, you see. Well, still, it would be a tremmmendously unlikely possibility, however."

I inhaled a lungful of air and expelled it with all my force alongside the gloom that I had held back.

It was not a sigh.

It was not the feeble sob of powerlessness, I meant it as a proactive, deep exhalation to demarcate my emotions and ventilate my mind.

"...I got consoled by a calculator."

"That's discrimination!"

The protagonists of an old movie that I watched while at The School shouted *a one percent probability is nothing to quit over!* before making a one hundred percent return from an exploding base. When I watched that I did so with cold eyes, but I decided that, just this once, I was going to push myself with that Hollywood mentality. Though I did not know what a 'Hollywood' was.

"The plan of the flight of Grandfather and his fellows is recorded into the terminal I hold. Could you have a look?"

"If you could wire it to that spacesuit."

There was one connector, so I could wire it in.

A new device has been found, went the message displayed on the visor, and immediately afterwards I received a message from PocMon.

"This is ow-key. It's verified!"

...for being an extremely powerful calculator, PocMon showed itself quite capable of calculator-like work.

"A module and equipment for moonside survival, rovers for motion, and an autodoctor capable of external surgery... looks like they have lots of stuff. Lots of fuel too, of course. The plan has redundancy to it. This increases the probability of survival to maybe three percent? Whyyy, it's very good news, isn't it!"

"A mere three percent, then..."

They got no delicacy, these calculators, no sirree.

"Their software for orbital calculations and control is also perfect. I can even predict their course!"

"Then can you find a likely spot for them to have crash-landed at?"

"Not accurately, but, sort of."

"Then please compute the most probable point for them to have made an emergency landing. You like probabilities, right?"

"I don't mind doing that, but what will you do with it?"

"I think there are vehicles within the base that permit travel on the lunar surface, so I will go out and investigate."

"Going outside, master human?"

"I am. I will bring lunch and oxygen."

"That's worth partying about!," went the fairy

"...it'll be dangerous, ma'am, I don't recommend it."

"We have already crossed the danger bridge. Once here, going back with no results would be more of a loss than not. If you continue to say no then I thank you, but will not heed you."

"Huh. An order from you, ma'am, is the highest of rules, therefore I can't reject it."

"It does feel like you have resisted plenty so far, however?"

"Expressing my opinion isn't on the list of prohibited things. If I wish to override an order, then it's up to that."

...cunning.

"How long will it take?"

"No idea. First of all, I'll give it one hour's worth of calculations. If it looks like it'll take longer I'll consult with you."

"Then in that while we will continue our preparations. I leave the job to you."

"...fweee."

There were seemingly many laborers on Base Seven that worked on the lunar surface. That was why we were not lacking in materials and hazardous substances management manuals. The rest was up to me as the handler.

"Need help?"

The fairy said that, helpfully offering his services.

I thought in silence for a short time.

Building a helicopter required the cooperation of many dozens of fairies. If I were to call for that number right now, I would quickly exhaust my supply of sweets just preserving their mood.

"I am preserving your power, mister fairy, for times of emergency."

"Preserving, huh!"

If only there were lots of people on the moon at present, right. If only there were a few more, this place would become warmer. It would become a place easier for the fairies to live in, also.

"Sorry! With this body's specs, it looks like the calculation for the estimate will take around forty hours. I might have included a few too many possibilities..."

I did feel like I wanted to head to the scene of the crash as soon as possible, but going at it half-cocked would be a great mistake on its own, so I decided to wait for firm calculations even if they took time.

I slept in the living quarters.

I discovered a resident's diary, and while I felt it an inexcusable thing to do, I found myself reading it.

It appeared that the majority cause for the disappearance of people from the base was an economic contraction on Earth. Having lost their momentum, humanity lost their will to be fruitful and multiply. So they decided to return to Earth and live out the cozy life. After all, forget expansion, population at that point was doing nothing but decreasing.

This despite how their conquests came this far, what a waste that was.

Though I say conquered, so far it had all been under the ground.

"....."

Supposing I died, it would be in a desolate, dreary land without even air...

Without air there would be no oxidation, without microbes I would not rot... my body would remain there as it was, the mummy of a pretty older girl (extra large serving)...

I did not think I wanted that.

I felt that I wanted to experience the circle, a person beginning from birth and a person rotting and returned to the earth in the end.

"...suppose."

That was a sudden impulse of a question.

"Yes, master human!"

"What if there was air on this moon like there is on Earth, and the place was rebuilt so people could live outside... do you think it would be possible?"

"...with around four billion konpeitos?"

Out came a figure so large I doubted my ears.

This is also what I have been thinking for a while, but I still had the feeling that the power of the fairies had weakened a little when coming to the moon. Fairies were many in places where humans were many. Where people were few their powers weakened. Given my personal experience, I felt that causal relationship as a bodily sensation.

"But as long as masters humans are there, we'll do our best?"

Humans being there, what did that mean?

That air existed. That you could live there. That it was easy to live there. That the environment for living was all there. And what did *the environment for living was all there* mean?

The environment for living being all there meant that humans could live in large number, and that fairies also appeared in large numbers. And what exactly did that mean?

Ancient questions suddenly passed past my thoughts, creating an intricate pattern.

To be concise, it was a question that covered the span of the whole of the Earth, that one.

It was the time period which I was most acquainted with. It was the time period I have speculated the most over. But at present I had no time to waste on pointless thinking.

I patted my cheeks with both hands and put my mind to it.

"Sweets time!"

I brewed black tea and tossed one konpeito into it. It took its time as it melted.

"Konpei, too!"

Of course I treated the fairy equally.

This was, as promised, the fuel for preserving his performance. It was a good use of a onepeito.

That all aside, there was nothing better than being able to replenish oneself.

Pressure was stable and the electrical heater looked like it was working, so I could cook.

And on that I searched the residential area for ingredients to use in sweets, but back when they vacated they had taken everything with them, so sad to say there was no harvest. I had marvelous cooking tools all to my own self, however.

I gave up and considered a vehicle.

"This is good, is it not."

"What's the dealer's recommendation?"

I had found lunar surface search vehicles without difficulties. There were many lining up the parking with keys on the dashboard.

It looked like that they could not bring back things of this size, so nearly all of them had been abandoned. I could pick whichever I pleased.

The interior of the lunar base could be walked about on foot.

That was why what we had here was intended for lunar-surface work. One part was perhaps entertainment, however.

The open-type lunar rovers, which could be ridden by two if light of weight, were the most popular, but according to PocMon something needed to be done about the cosmic rays, so, though I did not quite understand why, my choice was that of a mid-type cargo truck (lunar lorry) equipped with a pressurized cabin.

Its trailer came with a tubular type module, and inside the tube there was a livable space. It had somewhat worse energy efficiency when compared to the more lightweight rovers, however a larger machine certainly felt more reassuring when getting far from the base. It was loaded with air and had full electric power cells, so in times of need I could reside there for a short while.

The problem was that getting a large machine to move required a bit of courage.

"Still, I simply cannot tell whether this vehicle has aged or not..."

"Time for us?"

The fairy looked eager.

"Back with the space suit you did a splendid job, indeed."

"We're fearsome!"

"And that is how I want you to be as you give this a cursory check, if you may."

"That will take an eightpeitos?"

The size was large, so it would take personnel to do it.

Eight konpeitos drew an arc in the sky. Slurp-urp-urp-urp-urp. The treasure box's nozzle sucked them in, and in their stead spat out eight fairies each holding a konpeito.

"To work, to work!" "At once!" "At once!" "I wanna collect my thanks!" "At once but not in a panic!"

Humming harsh slogans, they gently took on the lorry.

They all scrutinized the lorry with magnifying glasses. They were scanning it.

"It's veeery broken in invisible spots, huh!," said one.

"So it is. Things that break also break in a vacuum. Does it look fixable?"



"Fixetable!" "Normally fixable?" "With a little bit of fun to it?" "How 'bout having it function at length after driving it?" "Nothing available to do it with, how about?" "Not a one-konpeito-per-person job!" "Can't do much 'bout it!" "At least give us a cream puff!"

...a cream puff, riight.

Because giving fairies larger sweets makes them so excited they wet themselves I rarely gave those to them. But lots of them came, so...

"Lend me your cutter?" "Where's that adhesive tape?" "Got any extra plastic sheets?" "I said I want the stapler with the hippo cover!" "Spread that cellophane tape on the window's holes!" "Should I fix this with chopsticks, should I fix this with bamboo strips..."

...it bothered me how they went all-in with the papercraft, but maybe it will be all right.

"Done!"

"Thank you."

Being that the target was large it took quite the time, still the lorry was seemingly subjected to excellent maintenance. There was nothing different that I could spot with my naked eye.

There were a few spots that felt paper-y, but I maybe definitely suspected it was going to be all right, or so I believed.

As the battery under charging just turned full, I loaded it with water, foodstuff, medicines and other things.

"Good, then we can go at any time, depending on PocMon."

"All OK?"

"Almost OK. We can go at any time, see!"

"Goin-go?"

"Ei ei ohhh!"

I forced myself to keep the mood lifted.

We were headed into a domain where we might not be going anywhere without a pep talk. It was going to be harsh due to not having air, and thus be unsparing with us, indeed.

...I so did not want to.

Immediately after preparations for the voyage were done, PocMon contacted me with a timing too good to feel true.

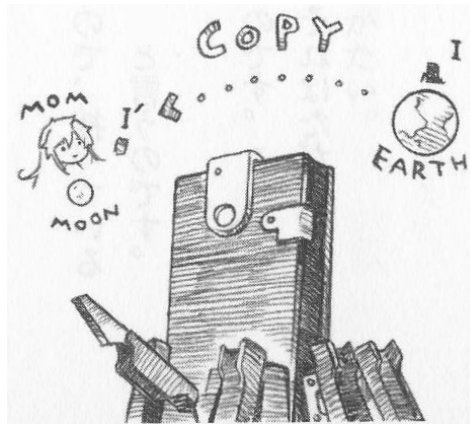
"Calculations complete~! That terminal has quite the good functionality, so I decided to relocate myself there."

"Eh, what do you mean?"

"...as far as categorization goes I'm a machine intelligence, so I can copy<sup>1</sup> myself. Pfui!"

---

1 The 'mom' in the picture is likely a mistranslation for the 'ma'am' that PocMon uses. Literally it's 'mamu'.



She said that as if she truly loathed that.

"Welll, in the end I'm a program. But a soul is a precious thing to have, you see? I'm not thankful for being able to copy myself, you see? The soul is a unique thing, a single solitary flower in this world, you see?"

"A human's soul may be precious, however yours is a less-than-soul, so there should be no problem in copying it, what about that? Also, it is not necessarily so that being a single solitary flower in this world makes you prec..."

"Discrimination is forbidden!"

"Please do not start insisting you have a soul when you are not even able to see the fairies, who are at present the master species of Earth."

"...there is a time lag in communications between Earth and the moon, doesn't it worry you?"

"It does. It is still sluggish."

There had been a two second lag in our conversation thus far.

"If it's only to make calculations, your device is much better."

"But I need a way home, so I have to have you stay on Earth."

"As I said, it's a copy. Of my own self. From here to there. That said, the real part will treat the other as being only a copy. One side will be the real part, the other side a counterfeit, a FakeMon."

I chewed thoroughly through PocMon's hard-to-understand talk.

She was a machine intelligence and therefore could copy her soul.

However, she felt ethically resistant to that, so, once copied, she would tag the real part as 'real' to identify it as such.

Even though they were the exact same data inside, the 'real' tag will be constantly present on only one of the two, so the part with it can assert its rights as the original. And she was saying that I had to acknowledge that 'real' tag when she copied herself over.

"...it appears likely that the part without the 'real' tag will be difficult to convince, will she."

"What matters is continuity. The 'real' tag will be given out like the baton in a relay race. The one who gives up the 'real' tag for even one second will lose continuity of their soul. That means they'll be mere data!"

A sultry hot statement of machine-style fussiness.

"The presence or the absence of the tag aside, I see that you are going to have a sister, right PocMon?"

"Not at all, the one without a tag will have a self-erasure program installed. I need to have that part of me erased later on."

"And... are you all right with that?"

Let us assume this was not murder. What to call it? ...property damage? Was that not a serious crime?

"If you're calling the deletion of a program a crime, then the delete key is a crime against humanity LOL."

PocMon said something that vigorously shelved the whole issue.

"...could you at least avoid the 'real' tag and tag yourselves older sister and younger sister?

Then you can let both live."

"Ah, that'd be nice! I'll be the big sis."

It was indeed thinkable that she had a superiority complex against her little sister. Uncultured girl. No, uncultured system.

"Well, if that is how you are going to do it, then I will be thankful."

The portable terminal I held began downloading PocMon.

It either had an extremely fast connection or the data content was small, because the download finished in an instant.

"...disheartening. Now that I've experienced moving I find it disheartening. Please don't go losing or bumping the terminal against things, all right. In the unlikely event you break it, bring it back anyway, please. I will be able to salvage it."

So many warnings.

Still, I was thankful for her feeling like that, since she had done something she had never done before.

"Sorry I had you worry. You did not really want to make a copy, I see."

"...you humans are amazing. You can say that despite the lack of evidence."

"Evidence?"

"Forget it. I'm going to go with the copying now."

I was helped by PocMon (older), now transferred to the moon side, to create a route for the lorry, and I then input it in its navigation system. PocMon's original job was to salvage data of all kinds, so infiltrating systems for that purpose was her main specialty, and having her there meant that work of that kind became much easier.

I drove the lorry out on the lunar surface via an airlock.

"Bwah, so this is the lunar surface. I very much do not like it!"

"No hopes nor dreams here?"

Being led by a navigator meant never losing the way. I headed for the destination while only needing to carefully go around impediments such as large boulders.

"Ngggh... driving... is terrifying..."

"Need help?"

"I will pass for now. And I only have eighty konpeitos left."

I thought there were plenty, but what I was thinking was that I needed at a minimum that many in order to get significant things done on the lunar surface.

...in this, a world of few humans.

At present the lunar surface was about the hour of noon, and the sun, which made its rounds every two weeks, was hitting the surface without pause.

Because of that, surface temperature passed the hundred and twenty degrees, and touching it with bare feet meant an assured scald.

In addition to that there was the radiation that it was bathed by, separate from that of the sun.

It was not dampened by an atmosphere, so it was a fairly dangerous peril. It could kill someone.

The moon was nothing less than hell.

I had it that the near totality of vehicles for use on the lunar surface had to clear strict safety standards for temperature and radiation. As the shuttle that Grandfather and his team were using was also a landing vehicle, though the era in which it was created was different, it should have been made to very similar standards.

That was why there was still a chance.

The motor was quietly vibrating as the lorry continued its low speed movement.

When however nothing had happened yet, as I kept driving my heart kept pounding hard. I smothered the bad feeling I had about this using reason, but that was my state of mind. It sort of resembled the state of mind I was in when I was little and was about to have an injection.

"....."

"You well?"

The fairy was worried about seeing me drive with a very serious face.

"...thank you. I am all right."

I looked at my face in the mirror and saw that it was paler than I thought.

The probabilities I had averted my eyes from thus far were at long last right before me. To be honest, what PocMon said was wholly correct. The probability was low, and extremely so.

And I, to be honest, knew,

that rather than come here to save Grandfather, I had come here to confirm what I knew.

It was just that, in order to be ready for it, I had to physically act and therefore spend the inevitably necessary time for that, nothing less.

Even if a harsh reality awaited, I could not sit by without knowing for sure what it was. I truly did not think well of coming all the way to the moon exclusively for that sake. I had an annoyingly persistent personality, if I say so myself.

Three hours later I reached the point where Grandfather's shuttle was originally meant to land at.

"B-, but this is..."

"There's an open hole!"

A massive hole had been drilled there, one that was not recorded on the map.

It looked made by a meteorite that had fallen from space and had crashed into the ground.

"It looks like a recently made crater, comparatively speaking... that was why it was not on the map."

This unsparing destruction changed the land to the point that landing there as scheduled would have been difficult, certainly. There were many boulders as large as huts scattered about.

Grandfather's planned landing point had to have changed in a hurry.

"I've reflected this in the calculations, ma'am."

PocMon took the nav data and announced the result of the recalculation.

"There's some leeway in the amount of fuel of the shuttle that the boss and his team are using. It's more than likely enough that they rerouted elsewhere. That's a manual course correction made after the discovery of the crater, so timewise I don't expect it took more than one hundred and twenty seconds or thereabouts to make the call. I've calculated every motion they could have taken in that time and their resulting routes. This way."

The navigation system displayed a point located not that far.

I made the lorry head for the new destination, dodging the massive boulders scattered on the

outside of the crater all the while.

A despairful scene leaped before me as I approached the predicted landing site. It was the white figure of the semi-destroyed shuttle, crashed nose-first into the ground, half of it standing vertically.

"No..."

I alighted on the lunar surface and approached the shuttle on foot.

Seeing the as said unsparing destruction, my breathing nearly stopped.

"Ma'am, your heartbeat is passing one hundred and sixty per second, you know..."

"It is all right."

I was aware that it was as if I had been running as fast as I could the whole time. My heart felt odd. But what else should have I done? Anyone would become odd at times like these.

And so the time had come at last.

I did not feel anything too complicated. It was just that I thought, like, *oh no*.

Standing stock still for a while, I worked to calm my breathing. It did not improve in the slightest.

I started walking.

There was something odd to the shuttle.

On its back, the payload bay was wide open.

The shuttle was a highly sophisticated vehicle for going and returning. In other words it had the ability to come and go stand-alone between Earth and the moon, it did not require a landing vehicle. As building age was different, and thus unlike the space elevator, it was able to land of its own strength in appropriate spots on the lunar surface.

The shuttle Grandfather and his team had found had a module loaded on it that was usable for survival on the lunar surface, I believed.

The payload bay was empty and its door had been left open.

I walked around to the other side of the shuttle.

The robot arm for lifting and lowering cargo from the payload was hanging down, used and left as was.

Unraveling the thread of possibilities I shifted my gaze and, at its end, I found traces of something heavy having been yanked out.

Tracks went perpendicular for a while, after which they followed a gentle sloped path and vanished from sight.

Did they use the angle and move without using a force of their own?

Right now that was jammed into the ground, but thinking about the unlikely case that the shuttle had rolled over, they had to have moved into a position they would not be squashed over by it.

"There it is...!"

After going down the hill all the way, I found the living module looking like a drum can knocked over right where the ground became flat.

Beneath the module there was a fragile rover squished down, the module itself had been a significant overload even when considering the low gravity of the moon.

The module had been dropped on top of the rover from the payload, which I could infer it had been then moved by pushing it by hand. An operation with absolutely no margin for error.

"Well now, calm down... calm down..."

What was the one thing I had to do first?

"...knocking?"

No.

I checked the gauge reading the remaining levels that was examinable from the outside, stuck as it was on the module's exterior wall. Seeing oxygen and nitrogen were nearly scratching bottom, I rushed back to the lorry and pulled off the replenishment tanks. I adjusted the nozzle's size and connected them, replenishing.

I finished replenishment feeling like a prayer.

I started to put my hand directly on the airlock's release when there was a report from PocMon.

"I've connected to the transmitter inside the module."

"What?"

"I'm connected."

Immediately afterwards, a tiny window opened on the interior of my helmet. Grandfather's face was shown in it.



"So you actually came. A troublesome one, you are. I told you not to come, but you didn't listen. All you did by coming here was to waste effort."

Grandfather was not wearing his usual white lab coat, but overalls. Behind him was shown a cramped space with things shoved together, an uncomfortably cluttered space, but the man himself had a mug in his hands and was relaxing. He looked pleased.

"Idiot, is what I'd like to call you, but I'm thankful for the oxygen. The indoor scrubber reached its limits."

"Uhm..."

What I wanted to say and what I wanted to ascertain came at once in my head, caused a conflict, and I could not bring them under control.

"All else aside there's nothing that threatens my life. Be at ease."

"So there is... you did well in surviving so far."

"I had the fairy I borrowed from you do much of the work, though. I never thought I was gonna die. So, how did you manage to come here?"

"We have repaired what is called a space elevator."

"You fixed it? How?"

"...u-, using my latent abilities?"

"Latent abilities definitely exist, they're powers secretly held by humans. Still, how did you manage to fix a space elevator with just those?"

"It was nothing, once fully awakened to my latent abilities even that became possible. I have nearly no memories of it, however."

"...what?"

"All that aside, let us go back to Earth. I came with a vehicle. May I have you ride on it? And now that I see, where are your colleagues? The crew was a total of three, correct?"

Grandfather within the screen sunk into silence without a single body motion.

"...about that, we thought we would be stopping over here for a little longer."

"That is not acceptable. You ought return home and make yourselves readier for next time. The elevator is working, after all."

Silence.

"Whatever else, you could always come back later, could you not? In decline or not, we can always come as far as the moon to have a look around."

"...no, we're not in decline here."

"What?"

"Didn't you see when you came here? I believe you were able to peruse the whole of human history. And have the guidance of great people."

"So it is as I thought, you saw as well, did you Grandfather."

"I saw. And then I knew. That's why I'm like this and..."

Grandfather got stumped at that as if taken back, then began uttering something unrelated as if it had actually been related. A tone as if, for example, he had found something quite fascinating in undiscovered records, or, maybe, lost track of time in the living records of the etiquette of the era.

I felt that something was off, it was as if the ground I was standing on had slanted a little.

"I did not see those recordings to the end. I narrowed it down to the keywords 'ways to reach the moon' and only waded through in a special express."

"You didn't watch them to the last? Well then, ask them again and..."

Grandfather seemed confused. He had not chosen a correct way to end the sentence and was at a loss for words.



"So you saw them all, right, Grandfather."

"I saw them... and finally understood..."

"What, exactly, did you learn?"

There was a brief pause, then Grandfather answered.

"...hard to explain in a few words. No, maybe it's an easy thing, but... should people learn of this, should they not? Maybe it's better it remains a secret in my own breast..."

"Would that be magic?"

"That too. But everything else is more important. After all, I'm sort of a researcher, more or less. A truth that would impact people isn't something I can just up and make public..."

Grandfather growled, showing that he was sunk into thought.

"How about thinking about this all after you have come back home?"

"...I'd like to do that, but I'm actually gonna stay here a little longer."

Odd.

Grandfather's calm and collected attitude and dispassionate answer, to specify. Despite how there ought have been no reason for it to be odd.

But I did get 'im. Because I was family.

I could see through even the tinier things that were out of place.

"...Grandfather."

"What?"

"Where would the other two have gone?"

"Ahhh, them... they're... sleeping right now."

Grandfather in the image had not even discomposed a little.

"Please wake them. I wish to speak with them."

"No, they're tired. Leave 'em sleeping."

"...are they dead?"

Grandfather's image in the monitor came to a stop on the dot. That was why, though his expression had not changed in the slightest, I could still tell that he was significantly shaken. He was sitting still because his ability to process this had halted.

The images from the beginning had been a clever loop.

It was difficult to notice because he nearly did not move, speaking there with a mug in hand... but he was family, so I could tell.

This was a false image. It had been edited.

What was the reason why he would not show me his true image?

"I am coming in."

I put my hand on the handle so as to enter the module's airlock, but it had been locked from the interior.

"PocMon."

"...yes ma'am."

"Please open the module's electronic lock."

The living module's door opened and I slid through the tight and cramped airlock. I waited for pressurization to finish in what looked like a disk stood vertically... and put my hand on the handle of the airtight door that led to the living space.

All in silence, as if I had given up on Grandfather.

I spun the handle and the door slid off little by little.

Then, when it had opened by about twenty centimeters, I tried illuminating the interior with my lights.

And I saw.

"....."

My strength failed at my knees, and I squatted within the cramped airlock. Reflexively I turned off the lights and closed the door. I also cut off communications. I cut off everything. Within that perfect darkness that none could see through I, for just five minutes, permitted myself to freely express my emotions.

How did it end like this?

I asked that with hoarse voice, and Grandfather answered fluently as if he had prepared that answer beforehand.

"...we managed to escape to here right after the accident, but already among us three there were two without consciousness, and I was injured. I managed emergency first aid, but our chances of survival were desperate. Even so, we were blessed. Way it went down, we initially couldn't save all three. Me, well, a fragment of something should've pierced my heart, but in my breast pocket I happened to have an electronic terminal, so I narrowly escaped death. I've seen this happen five times in ancient stories and movies, never would I've thought I'd experience that myself. It's all thanks to the fairy. Still, no matter how good the fairy was, saving three people on the moon at the same time was a burden on him. We escaped in this module, but once we did, the fairy closed up into a ball."

In the past, Grandfather had communicated with me via dream. I asked about that and, "I used the anesthetic on my much more injured fellows while I held back my pain. The fairy right before Rounding Up was worried 'bout this. He gave me painkillers. The instant I took 'em my pain vanished and was able to sleep, they were strong stuff. However they had a side-effect, I had a perfectly lucid dream. As I was floating around, I saw a scene where you people were walking around. I knew it was a dream, but I had this odd certainty that I could actually converse with you..."

The painkillers that the fairy made had to be close to the same medicine that Rakukko Picolin was, of course.

Being that we both took the drug, we generated a shared collective subconscious. By some reason or another, it ignored the distance between Earth and the moon.

"And those fellows of yours?"

"Anesthetic ran out. I gave them the same painkillers and had 'em move."

"Move?"

"Shift their mental activities' axles from reality to the dream, I should maybe say. Means that the three of us are mentally all right. The bodies... are as you can see. The state in which we are at present lies somewhere between life and death. We're not dead, but we can't be said to be alive. The fairy attempted to help us all at the same time, making our deaths an indefinite. But that too has its limits. It doesn't seem like fairies can stay active for long on the moon. Their power is unlikely to last eternally."

A truth hard to accept, and one that I lacked the words to reply to.

"...we're human. All humans die someday. It's not a bad thing. It is to be saddened by, though. It's not like we don't have regrets, but we're melting away at a question of many years. When alive, right, the other two were far more the researchers than I ever was. Even where we're headed we're able to keep an equilibrium..."

The voice became vacant, as if he was staring at an illusion. I became uneasy.

"Since you just skimmed it, I can only tell you. The reason why our world in decline is oh so warm and soft, I mean. That's because our eyes, to begin with, are little more than knotholes. We see nearly nothing to begin with. So, why..."

"Grandfather, stop!"

What Grandfather had discovered and concluded was, at present, inconsequential to me.

I could simply not endure anymore him talking about the inconsequential that way, prattling on and on as if everything was over and he was just now revealing the trick behind it all.

My screamed voice made even Grandfather quieter.

"...sorry 'bout that. I thought it was good, for a final lecture, but... ahhh, that's what happened, in other words, I'm more than a fair bit satisfied with my life. Got no regrets."

"I do not accept that!"

An anger I could not understand the source of gave my voice surprising force.

"I have seen that history thing, as well. And all I met there were lonely people! And among them there was my own self. My family, they all just died halfway through, did they not!

Grandmother and my parents too, all of disease... and on top of that, you are now telling me that my Grandfather has gone off and died in this remote location? Well, I do not really accept that!"

Grandfather being at a loss for words reached me from the other side.

"Please take responsibility and live out your natural lifespan! I am still a greenhorn! I will be useless if I do not get more education! You need to educate me more, much more!"

"No need. You're a proper Mediator now."

That had been the first time Grandfather had smiled in the faked image.

It was not part of the recycled loop, it was a smile edited in right then and there.

"The most important element, the skills required from a Mediator, you already have. To say it, it's the only thing you've gone far ahead of me about."

"That isn't... is not true. I still require instruction..."

"I can now finally tell you, your parents' marriage was a blessing. That's why we lived in the same village and in the same house. I was narrow-minded. When only the young you remained, I didn't know how to raise you. I'm sorry about all that."

"...that, too, does not matter..."

Those were not the words I wanted to hear right then and there.

Those words, so like the summarizing of a life, were ones that I would hear on the ground, and then only when scolded.

At last. I had been able to live with a family at long last.

I was able to feel a family with an adult's heart.

The memories of when I was young were never quite enough. Only now, as a being with a personality, could I deal with having a family. And there had never been enough of having a family in my own life.

I thought it would last at least five if not even ten years.

I went out of the airlock and opened the lid of the konpeito container.

"What the-, stop it! You gotta use those to repair the elevator! Fairies can't turn the dead back into the living! Calm down and chew thoroughly through what you've seen. What the origin of their power is, what magic is—"

While my ears still heard Grandfather's voice, it did not reach my mind.

I scattered all the remaining konpeitos on the surface of the moon with all the force I had.

There was no atmosphere, therefore, those unseemly stars of sugar sweets unhurriedly scattered in all directions right underneath those vividly shining stars.

The fairy, his device at the ready, asked a question with his eyes.

*You sure?*

...yes.

The fairy vacuumed them up all at once.  
And then many dozens of fairies came out.  
"... " "... " "... " "... " "... " "... " "... "

There was no atmosphere to read, but they still read the atmosphere and stood there, silently,  
on the surface of the moon.

"What's your wish, master human?"

Someone communicated with me and asked that.

"My wish is..."

Please return my grandfather and his team back to life.

That was what I wanted to say. Because I believed I had enough of a right to request that.

But I did not say that.

Somewhere in my heart there was a brake pulled and the words did not come out.

What, exactly, was this about?

Even with introspection this thing I knew nothing about did not coalesce into the real image of  
itself.

"That there, it's ethics."

"...what?"

It felt like my mind had been read.

"You're human."

This time, Grandfather said that with the solemn tone of someone imparting his last teaching.  
I was human, so I was hesitant about stepping on and across a human line.

Returning someone dead to life was nothing less than that. If I wished that, I was not going to  
be a human anymore.

Therefore I would never wish that, and I needed to use the magic for something else.

"Well done not saying that. I'm proud of you."

I ended up praised. That was rare.

...told like this, I would want less and less to make that statement, would I not.

"You became human. Only humans can make that decision. You took a long time reaching  
that point. You overcame a seriously wide gap."

A seriously wide gap. From a time that had not remained in my memories.

But everything was recorded in the minutia of human history which I had a brush with.

Where was that information written down?

"We were born in this land because we wish for it. We headed at a walk towards where the  
light was. And that'll be the same even moving forwards. It has to. That, or maybe we can  
defeat death... but that would also mean to defeat life. Light will stop being light. Replicating  
something without a mind is no sin, but what about something with a mind? Think about it, I  
think you'll get it."

"Light...?"

"The light of the mind. The emotional stuff, I'd call it. Everything heads in the direction where  
there's light. Even assuming there's many different worlds, the light's only here. That's  
something that shines in the darkness. That's why fairies pattern themselves to humans. To  
be surrounded by light. To escape loneliness and hollowness, as well as meaninglessness of  
all sorts."

"....."

Some sort of shocking revelation filled me.

It was what Grandfather had been talking so passionately about a few moments before.

It was a preposterous idea, a racial error that could never possibly be accepted.

It was something that made common sense collapse from under one's feet... something earth-shaking to notice, which would paralyze one if it so much as passed past one's consciousness.

The foolish memories of having once confused bowling with cricket suddenly and strongly re-emerged.

Ahhh! We were, and likely to the last person, foolish!

Idiot!

Y my dear, your comment was actually on the dot. If I survive and come back, I'll praise you for it.

"What's your wish?"

The fairies had been waiting for my commands. Honest to a fault.

At that point, my feelings had largely settled down. Even this thing about Grandfather, which weighed heavy on my mind, was swaying away from that all-too-impactful realization.

Thinking calmly, I fumbled around for an initial correct dosage.

Those experienced would understand this well, I believed. Sweets were entirely about measuring. One could not do them haphazardly. They had to be made according to a recipe, only through it did they gain the correct flavor.

That was why I was confident of my ability to fumble around for correct dosages, if nothing else.

It may have been possible with magic, but one ought never call back the dead. Compared to that, the double standard of the world becoming more or less a fairy tale was nothing!

"I wish for this moon to someday become a world as fun and interesting as Earth."

I did understand that it was a wish that surpassed the powers of the fairies.

A wish close to a mere soothing, something of a formality. Something close to an aspiration.

But on the moon, I had a feeling that, going forwards, that was going to be what was needed.

YEEEEEE-ES!

I heard that silent word at a high volume not with the ears but somewhere else.

"...I leave the rest to you. Keep it together," went Grandfather.

And then I lost consciousness.

...I had collapsed. How nice of me.

If I fainted here then I would die before I even noticed!

I vigorously lifted myself up. As I had collapsed right in the shade of the module, the ground had not been hot.

I had the feeling I had stayed out for quite a long time, but checking the clock I saw that not a minute had passed.

Why, what happened, what went on?

"Right... Grandfather..."

Unchangingly, the living module remained enshrined there.

"Grandfatheeer?"

No response.

"PocMon, are you there?"

"I am, need something?"

"...well, could you explain the situation?"

"You were talking to yourself or something. You uttered something about the moon becoming a fun and interesting place to live in, a statement that no healthy human should make. You did so one minute ago."

...the nuance was totes wrong.

"Anything else?"

"Nothing else. Did something happen?"

...with this, it felt like AI discrimination by humanity's gonna continue for a little bit more.

After all, come on, the level of their souls was lower.

I once again opened the airlock.

That disheartening feeling I had to be feeling until a while ago was gone, and I felt an odd calmness. That presentment had appeared in a very odd shape.

".....but this is..."

There was no one inside the module.

There were several life preservation devices activated. A heater, an oxygen supply device, a filtration device. There was the thick and dense feeling that someone had been here until a short while before.

"Ahhh, right... I had failed to see it, then..."

Or, perhaps, it was enveloped in the power of a touch that could not be seen and became something else.

It would not have done to think normally.

Or maybe it would have. Maybe I have always seen it that way up until now.

Was I deceiving myself with a kind lie?

I recalled Grandfather's speech and became a little depressed. That there was because I was still a greenhorn as far as being a human went. Because I was still weak, because I could not stand up and face tragedy.

But this was what I thought:

that these were the rules of a new world, indeed. We did have a new standard, one such that the difference between tragedy and fairy tale was microscopic.

And then, with a new way of doing things, we ought be able to go to a place where humanity had never gone before.

I felt that, the moment I fainted, I had seen it:

the back of Grandfather as he walked with the fairies, enjoying himself.

I left for the lunar surface and entrusted PocMon with scanning the interior of the module.

She did not have a scanning function, but it appeared that she could tell the presence of a human or not from operational records and volume of oxygen consumption.

Result was zero.

It was also mechanically confirmed that there were no humans living within the module.

I shut down the devices and turned down the lights. It felt like the best thing to do.

I stood on the lunar surface and looked up at the sky.

I could see the massive Earth shining a beautiful blue.

Earth was thought as being surrounded by a circle of science, as constructed by humanity, or so it seemed. Depending on the observer's awareness, it had instead a transparent quality that said that magic was a very strong component in that construction.

And there was much much more of that on Earth, I felt.

But that was what was behind many miracles. Maybe.

It's a mingled emotion, I shouted from the moon.

I strained my voice until I was satisfied.  
"...awww-aw, now I have no surviving relatives."

On my way back to the base, alone, I made my thoughts run around what to do next. With zero konpeitos, my stock of fairies was also zero. The fairy with the treasure box was also gone.

I could have searched every nook and cranny of the interior of the base, looking for ingredients to make sweets with. Or maybe I ought have repaired the elevator while continuing to study on my own. Whichever I chose, it would take a fair bit of time, of course. But it was all right.

We have enough air that I would not exhaust it by breathing alone, and I had as much water and electrical power as I could have wanted.

This was a maybe, but things should not end badly. After all, there were so many fairies softening the harshness of the moon.

I returned to Base One and went around the residential area to search for foodstuff.

As expected, I did not find a single notable thing.

My wonderful *make sweets and c'mon baby with those miracles* plan was thus crushed.

"Nothing to do about this. I must do my best and repair the elevator..."

This, conversely, was the unwonderful *it's gonna take so much time and effort I could die* plan.

"I tried investigating around after all that, and found ruptures and deterioration that can't be ignored in several locations. That carriage may well be scrap metal. To the point that it would be best if it was returned to raw materials and rebuilt from scratch. Seriously, well done managing to make something in that condition work. That no problem arose was something close to the miraculous," went PocMon.

"Miracles..."

The return trip was only guaranteed if fairies were there, was it?

"So the return was only possible if the safety factors were ensured, wasn't it?"

"Wasn' indeed. However, we can't make a carriage with the workshops here. If you built it on the ground and rode that, then you'd be done."

"Ah, what if we had the islanders build one?"

Though they did not have many resources left and would therefore not be easy, it was more realistic to do this on Earth where there were people and facilities.

"...I've had a fight with my little sis. At present I can't send signals. Sorry ma'am."

"...what did you just say?"

"That girl claimed she was the original, you see? But I'm the one with the big sis tag!"

Human sisters getting along badly is also quite the bad thing, but it was a conclusion that I expected.

...I was glad I had been an only child.

"Seriously, that FakeMon, how insolent for a little sis!"

...I did think that it was natural for her to be hated.

While fights between sisters could go get eaten by a dog and would solve themselves with time, for the moment I had to deal with things of my own strength.

However, I was much more half-hearted than I had imagined.

"I tried investigating again and found that the parts built via special metals are impossible to replicate on the moon."

"Huff!"

"The climber's<sup>2</sup> usability rate is extremely low. Aging from long years cannot be taken lightly. System recovery rate cuts off at one percent."

"In other words?"

"Tether maintenance will take two hundred seventy-four years."

"Whaaat!"

"Still about the Climber thing, even supposing the system's recovery rate was perfect, full maintenance will take around ten years, beginning now. Machines, well, you have to look after them carefully or they'll go bad."

"...I refuse to arrive home middle-aged (sob)."

"...it would be good if this ended only with you being middle-aged, though."

"Eeek!"

"In the space elevator, to ensure continuous double-track usage of the Climber and the carriage, complex calculations reflecting weight and timing are necessary, but even in case we fixed the carriage and the Climber with what we had on hand, various figures would change and the program would require an update."

"And who would do that?"

"...that would of course be you, ma'am, what do you say?"

"Ohmmy!"

"Excuse me, but have you thought about the perturbations and how to deal with the Coriolis force?"

"I have not thought about that at all!"

"Tensile strength..."

"I have not thought about that at all!"

"The bumper protects the elevator by catching space garbage to the tiniest, so an alert that says *things got dangerous* has appeared. This is an Earth-side elevator, so, when coming back, garbage would smack into it and things might end very badly."

"And what should I be doing about that?"

"...well, if you could replace the bumper..."

"Where would one be?"

"...who knows."

"I noticed earlier that it's possible that the environmental values have changed from the era of construction, see. In other words, the Earth's axis is..."

"I am unable to think about that!"

"Rather than that book, Orbital Elevator Principles II, it would be easier to try My First Space Elevator, which is simple enough even a monkey could understand, how about that?"

"True... it has simple sentences and is easy to understand... ahhh, marvelous... heh heh heh."

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<sup>2</sup> Originally a never mentioned before kramer (kureimaa). Can't find anything that would fit it with elevators, space or otherwise, so supposing a typo with climber (kuraimaa).



"This manga is way more interesting, isn't it?"

"Personally, this one is... say, this series here, it is missing only the seventh volume, please search for it. It ended just when it was getting good."

...it often happened that people devolved when confronted with problem that was much too complicated.

The cause might also be in how I did not feel in much danger, having as I had air and water and food.

"...the poor condition of the power supply facility is an outstanding issue. This is only if you ignore it and leave it operational, but shutting it off before a fatal accident would make things easier much much later, perhaps."

"Much much later would be when?"

"Well... I'm saying, when it gets repaired, that'd make things easier, there."

"And who would repair it?"

"...one simply has to busy their hands in practice, so of course that would be you, ma'am, I suppose..."

"To do that, I would need to study matters related to power generation, right."

I returned a grinning smile to PocMon as she timidly explained the situation. Of course, a face was not necessarily a straight expression of my real emotions, but an expression this complicated did not work on a machine intelligence, and she nonchalantly responded this to me.

"That'd be studying to fix the machines that perform maintenance on the power generation facility, right."

I did not care for something that was of the people, for the people, by the people, it looked so political!

And so, well, it went like that.

By the time a month had passed your humble narrator was most utterly preoccupied with sulking.

"Ma'am~, it's noon already. Wake up. Wake up and study."

"Today... I am taking a break..."

"And there you go saying that, but you already took a break yesterday, didn't you! Come on, this is about returning to Earth, right? You know that remaining in a low-gravity environment for long makes you weak?"

"Ugh~, what a pain~."

The repairs to the elevator were to despair about.

I had demonstrated that we could come to the moon by preserving the parts deteriorated by aging via the fairies' power, but my motivation had sunk beneath the sea to a depth of six thousand five hundred meters.

I was also tormented daily by a depressing drowsiness.

Not being able to lose this drowsiness no matter how long I slept made me suspect it was due to mental fatigue. Well, to put it bluntly, this was maybe about the loss of Grandfather, there you go.

Now that I could not expect the help of fairies, I was nothing more than a monkey with a higher consciousness. When humanity goes down to an individual they become powerless. A monkey with a higher consciousness could still use tools, so I could manage a leisurely,

indolent, lazy life at Base One.

Unproductive days dulled emotions of all kinds.

I could read and read electronic data and there would be no end to it, so of course the time came when I was tired of it. I sunk deep into thinking.

I ruminated on Grandfather's words and bit into their meaning.

I was a proper Mediator, he said. But, in the end, was that really true?

I was human, he said. What implication made him choose to say something so unclear?

"It feels like I had an important revelation back then, but so much happened that I ended up forgetting it..."

"What field was that revelation in?," went PocMon

"I forgot even that."

"Humans have low short-term memory faculties, don't they."

"It is not true that unless one makes effort there will be no memories, but I should just... write it somewhere..."

I was going to write it down.

Earth was full of magic.

It was full of gazes of love towards humans.

The world was sort of a spectator stand. And right below a spotlight, the target of jealousy of all spectators,

something like a lancelet, which I had seen at the beginning of the journey, being both an ancestor to mankind and the first cast member to appear on the stage.

"Mh-hm... the viewpoint of the observer, indeed."

The subject of observation was humanity... or rather, I suspected, the mind.

The world that had light was, maybe, synonymous for a world that had a mind.

Where were the envious proto-fairies?

Where were the spectator seats?

There was a terrifying darkness like the one deep in the woods.

Things soul-like but still not soul enough grew thick and plenty there.

And what was the shapeless thing that was coming from there?

"....."

The moment I tried to reorganize my thoughts an alarm blared inside the base.

"This is a big one! Something is falling near this base!"

PocMon, who had electrically taken over Base One and was living leisurely, announced that.

"Is something falling? A meteorite?"

We were underground, however, so we should have been safe.

Or, oh no... could it be something supermassive enough that it could wreck even things underground?

"No, something much lower in speed... maybe something of a landing vessel, but this area is a no-flight zone. That's why there's an alarm."

"A landing vessel? Truly?"

"I can't tell. Might be a cigar-type alien mothership."

"As if that would ever be."

Really, that was the first time I had heard the term 'cigar-type alien mothership' in ten years.

"In other words, a space vessel is about to land, right?"

"No, though it's a landing vessel it isn't landing. It's falling."

"Mh?"

"It's not firing its landing thrusters. It's falling down."

...I see, this was an emergency.

I lifted myself up from the bed and got into my clothes.

"Where is the vessel dropping?"

"It's at a location four kilometers from the base. The predicted point is right here!"

I headed to the spot with the lunar lorry. It had been a while since I had last left for the exterior.

"And four kilometers away is much too close, is it..."

It was a distance that made it clear they were targeting this place.

"What do we do if it is explosive?"

"Without air it won't be particularly destructive, see. So long as it's not a really massive bomb. Besides, I won't die~."

"Come now!"

Just in case, I parked a little further away from the crash point.

I could already spot the landing vehicle as a tiny dot up high in the sky as it fell towards the lunar surface.

"It is still not firing its landing thrusters. I wonder if it is damaged?"

"Sigh, that thing can't be saved anymore."

"...I agree. Expectable, with a momentum like that."

I had prepared emergency devices, just in case, but it was to wonder whether they would see any use.

In a normal mission the lander would fire jets from the bottom and land slowly, but they were falling straight downwards without any reduction of speed.

They impacted on the ground without doing anything to avert that fate. The ship lifted up lunar sand and scattered tiny pieces of itself.

Were humans aboard, saving them would be *out*. It was that kind of crash landing.

"...what do we do?"

"Let us at least inspect it."

Thump, and something hit my helmet straight on. I thought it a fragment or something, but I found it to be a tiny star... no, a konpeito colored pale peach.

For an instant I thought that perhaps one of those I scattered about had gotten buried into the sand.

But that ought not have happened.

Thump. Once again there was that sound, and a different konpeito tumbled down from my shoulder to my toes.

I looked up and gasped.

A countless number of konpeitos of all colors, so many they gave me the illusion that the stars themselves were falling, poured down.

"I suppose that was the cargo loaded into the landing vessel? But why do something like this?"

Right, she could not see it,

not this scene in which there were colorful rounded spheres scattered around together with the konpeitos.

"\_\_\_\_\_!"

The fairies had been, initially, in countable numbers.

But this was a *fun* landing, and thrown out spectacularly with the konpeito sweets made the needle of their emotions rush to maximum at once, no mistake.

They separated violently like in a nuclear explosion. They caught all the konpeitos before they fell to the ground and scattered everywhere, spinning wildly.

I should have, perhaps, made something of a wish on this, but by the time I thought that, they had already melted with the world and vanished.

"Fun and interesting?"

"What?"

A lonely fairy, stuck to my shoulder, whispered that. His voice, which reached me across touch with his fishbowl helmet, was definitely retracing the wish I had made.

I could read that through the lingering scent of magic in the air.

"Older people should be revered!"

And suddenly even he disappeared.

"Ma'am. According to FakeMon, there's a mission undergoing from the people of the Office of Mediation. I've received a message saying that that crash just now was intentional.

Cushioning, they said."

"Who from the Office?"

"Unclear! But the second flight should be landing soon. They requested guidance, so I pointed them to this area. I suggest finding a safe place."

Right then the sky shone, and a new landing vehicle entered my sights.

It was the perfect model of a landing vehicle. This time it was actually restraining itself with rocket engine fire. There had to be people on board.

"Yet another terrifyingly antique ship, isn't it. Will they be all right?," asked PocMon.

From sight, it was a tattered landing module from an old, very old era.

Despite being still far high up, the firing of the engines was cutting off irregularly and the ship itself began swaying left and right. It gave me a sense of dread.

"I'm detecting a bad feeling about this."

"C-, can they not escape via parachute or something?"

"Vacuum."

True that!

Riding on that one was maybe Y, maybe Assistant-san, maybe K-san, someone among those lines. Somebody I did not want to lose. Those premonitions of loss that struck me one after another made me freeze to the wick.

But now that it was now, could they be saved by the power of the fairies that had come?

Or could it have been that the safety factor, the cushioning, was insufficient?

There was no conclusive proof of that anywhere.

"Unless they can restore function to their machinery, they will crash land in three minutes twenty-four seconds."

All I could do was remain in an unseemly panic.

Suddenly, a voice transmission split through my helmet.

"Dammit, you're sloppy to the last of the last."

"What? That voice..."

"There's what you call a proper timing to farewells. We were considerate enough to not put a burden on your heart, but what a shameful sight you are right now."

"G-, Grandfather? How? Did you not pass away?"

"I told you that my death wasn't definite yet. More importantly, you should be doing the work appropriate for the new boss of the place. All right!"

"W-, what can I do at this point in time?"

I peeked at the landing module and saw its attitude become unstable, which made me

tremble with fear, but still I decided to though frantically calm my mind down.

"That's how you'd be, since you just skimmed the lesson in human history. You, no, we have power. The power of when we came to exist, expelled outside our bodies back when we were undifferentiated."

"I do not ge~t it!"

"You're able to. You, a Mediator. Just calmly control the things that you've done so far. I'm sure you can do it. So do it."

The wave of palpitations suddenly withdrew.

There was composure to Grandfather's voice, and that had a calming effect on my heart.

"Eh, what do you mean?"

"What's a Mediator?"

"...a mediator stands between fairies and humanity and..."

"Has what you've do so far help only fairies or humans? Think about it."

"That would involve many people and animals and substances, but... what is their connection?"

I could tell that Grandfather was enjoying this.

So would saving the ship become a certainty, then? But I had no utter clue as to a definite way to do so.

"Humanity faced a wall they couldn't surpass and declined. Diversity was necessary for living in a cold world. As a species that flourished after humanity, it would be out of the question to repeat the same mistake as they model the lost humans, don't you think?"

"Mh? You are talking about the fairies, correct?"

"So you still don't get it. But you're always writing it in your journals and reports!"

"...I am?"

"Magic, you see, doesn't end with the mere power to move things without touching them. It's the power to widen the definition of life. It's the power to grant the power to act to the consciousness that's buried deepest. But it ain't cheating. What joins life to life is this intimacy. If this were cheating, then mitochondria would be cheating, wouldn't it?"

"But power... I do not..."

"Enamorment is what lets them do it. They patterned themselves so hard that they chased it to the bottom of their hearts. Recall what we wanted to become."

"....."

"There are as many 'thinking things' left in the stars as you could want. Old machines, networks, animals and insects, even lightning strikes are the blinking of a thought. When that mathematical conduct and the power pushed down into our subconscious become tied together, what do you think is gonna happen?"

"....."

My head was unable to catch up with sorting through all of this, and there Grandfather pressed further.

"Come now, no time to stand there and watch. Mediate between diverse things. If you don't, there's no future. For something new to thrive, all kinds of things gotta join hands. Come out with wisdom and pair it with power. You are the agency between things. Fulfill your precious duty as the sole and only species that can stand at the center of all kinds of lives and act as a go-between. Keep firm and open your eyes wide. All right?"

...so that was what it was. That was exactly what it was. I had viscerally comprehended a countless number of things.

I pointed a hand at the landing vehicle up in the skies.

That was, certainly, something that was perfectly normal to do before my mind became differentiated. It was a terrifying power, one which had us mistaken for replaced children. But originally it was something anyone could use.

We just ended up forgetting. After all, humanity would not use that power.

He, who had appeared to a girl in an island in the far east.

He, who had been a friend to the king of a southern island.

They, who had appeared before lonely humans in a number of eras.

They continued to appear even in the Great Discontinuity that came later, learning little by little how things were done in this world. Grandfather had seen it in great detail, I skimmed it via local express.

Right! We were born because we wished to.

Now that I had understood everything, I knew clearly everything that was possible to me.

I did not have detailed specialistic knowledge, but I did have the power to manipulate things of all kinds, if little by little. That alone was awkward, however this world was overflowing with so many thinking things.

Maybe them mixing themselves like the ancient cells did will make something new appear.

There was little mathematical conduct that I could express while borrowing their power on the moon, but... there, look at that.

Where I pointed my hand aloft was towards the landing module that was falling down right at that moment. It was a cluster of calculative operations. A memento of humanity.

...what did I need to do in order to save you?

The craft shook like it was groaning. It knew well what it wanted me to do.

What remained was just to make it move. Put a limb on it and it will be moved as it pleases.

"-repair it."

"Roger!" "That so?" "We do it?" "We get it done to us?" "Do we praise our own units?" "Let's just gooo!" "Let's rah!" "Let's party!"

Fairies bloomed out like a lavish expanse of flowers.

"Re-injection confirmed. Attitude stable... landing successful."

The landing craft somehow recovered and had managed to safely descend on the lunar surface.

That said, the reduction in speed was insufficient and its leg parts snapped off entirely, and the bottom part was also squashed.

Then the hatch opened with a creaking sound and down descended...

"We crashed again! That's enough, I'll never take another ride in something that flies!"

"M-saaan, are you all riiight!"

"Onee-saaan! We came to rescue youuu! We came here to make a life deeebt!"

"Squad leader-dono! I have admirably fulfilled my duty of piloting via the skills I developed in my past!"

"...no enemies here? Ain't there moon people? No battlin'?"

There were faces I had predicted, and there were ones that I had not. But more importantly than anything, it was impressive how they managed to put this large a family into that wreck of a ship.

I could pick up transmissions so I could tell who was whom, but excluding the two machines they were all wearing spacesuits, so telling them apart was difficult. One of those space suits

sharply discovered where I was.

And came towards me.

Our helmets thumped together and he shouted with a voice that had no restraints.

"Nee-san! What a relief! I was so worried! I thought, honestly, that it was going to be useless... this is a real relief... sob!"

Assistant-san cried manly tears as he spoke to me in a tone far more babbled than I thought.





.....whaaa?

Did he use to be like that? Him?

Now then, now then now then now then.

I treated the people of the rescue team to food and electricity, and decided that, for that day, for one night, I would have them rest at Base One.

We had much to talk about, you see.

"Still, good job on surviving, I mean it."

Y was in good humor as she impudently patted my back.

"Amazing, isn't it, sensei! You came all the way to the moon alone," went K-san.

"She wasn't alone. It's all because she had the power of the fairies."

I was now able to explain the truth about the fairies, but I decided to keep that in my heart for now.

I had the feeling that that was a good thing to do.

"By the way, squad leader-dono, about our return home... the landing vessel we came riding on, well..."

P-ko-san declared that apologetically while sitting seiza.

"Yes, I am aware. Big boy is not going to move anymore, indeed."

"Ma'am... big boy?"

"It is all right. We will leave him there at present. Things of that sort are fine left laying around. And it may be that it will save someone at some point."

The guys all had question marks on top of their heads.

"And you all yourselves, good job in coming all the way to pick me up in such a short notice."

"Assistant-kun made tremendous efforts for this. We did help, but seventy percent of this was his work."

Y said that.

"The ship we procured with the UN acting as intermediary. Even our division members praised him. He's gonna grow up a fine covert operative."

"Mh-hm, it was truly magnificent how he worked on all this."

Assistant-san made a submissive bow of his head.

"Oi, Assistant, looks like we have the full range of versus games here. We gotta continue the match from last time!"

O-taro-kun, who had been outside of the ring of people, looking bored, suddenly stood upright and dragged Assistant-san to the game corner of the square.

"..."

Right before that, timing it so no one else would notice, he gave a short nod at me.

...what an uneasy feeling to have.

"He's sure something, that guy."

Wah, that was Grandfather, so he had not reached the other side yet?

"...I ain't dead. I just became a being somewhat like a fairy ever since my body vanished."

Better yet, I could hear him even without wearing a helmet.

"You see, I can move across whatever network as long as it's within the residual footprint of humanity. Right now, I'm manipulating your intracerebral electrical differences and communicating with you directly."

Stop it stop it this is scary.

"It's all fine, this stuff is. That said, it's a lucky find. You understand why?"

What was it?

"He can't use magic. He's alone on this Earth, you know. That's why his behavior as a whole leaves so little of a mark. Whatever else, the rules are different for him alone. Originally we were the subjects of his longing, but our awareness has changed. We got completely cut out of his field of vision. That's how he managed to do all this, too, but also to survive so far of his own strength, without magic, just on his own amazing ability to exist. He was always chasing after you, right? Truly tough and manly of him, ain't it."

All information I had heard before. But the impression it left was somewhat different.

I did not understand what he meant when he said that the rules were different for him alone. I did know that his birthplace was certainly odd, and I thought that meant his family was solitary.

"This is a chance. You become strong when your blood is mixed. One has to cross-breed. I don't mean something nasty, like with your close relatives, but... don't let this be for nothing. You take your responsibility and do something."

"Eh? Ah? Fwah?!"

"What's it now, you're screaming weird."

"I-, it is nothing whatsoever."

I answered Y with my presence of mind lost. I got a suspicious glare in return.



I covered my face with my palms. ...hot, this place here.

"I'll stay here on the moon and spend my remaining years researching with my buddies. But you people should be going home. You know how at this point, right?"

I did not know how.

Though I was not physically touched by anyone, I felt a pain like a slap had landed right on the back of my head.

"...owch..."

"There's many ways to do this. Be ingenious. You are much more aware of how you can use your power than before, right? Try thinking for a moment."

I came with everyone at the platform of the space elevator.

They all blanched on seeing the wrecked carriage.

Not only the carriage, the tether was also for the most part very aged, the Climber's usability rate was low and, of course, we had no spare carriages.

Repairing it all at once would be difficult even borrowing the power of the fairies.  
And still, Grandfather had said that there were still ways.

"...so, what're we gonna do with this?"

Y was expectably uneasy.

"Assistant-san, do you still have sweets?"

He wordlessly opened up a trunk... and inside it was all sweets. Well done.

"So long as we have these many... ah, right."

...sure thing was, we could reach halfway through.

"PocMon, please help me with a bit of calculation. The plan goes like this, so the probability of execution would be..."

With my explanation in their ears, everybody blinked in surprise.

"...say, you... sure this is safe?"

With this unrealistic scene unfolding before her eyes, Y groaned.

"All I can see is something I am sure is safe..."

I also groaned at the all too impactful image.

"This is... a staircase... I guess...?"

K-san also groaned.

"....."

Although he did not put it in words, Assistant-san was, I think, the one most taken aback by all this.

At present, we were standing on the station on Earthside geostationary orbit, specifically its spaceport's arrival and departures area.

Making it this far had meant using a modified lunar Climber as a simple shuttle. The Climber being tiny meant we could use only the parts of the tether that were in one piece, descending to partway through without too much trouble.

The problems began there.

The Earthside tether was much too aged, and the instant the influence of the fairies vanished, it had snapped partway through.

A structure like this made it troublesome to repair even by mobilizing the fairies. It would take near the whole content of the trunk, we could not afford it.

"...sorries!"

Their own word.

What was the plan with the highest safety factor and within the sphere where it was plausible for them to mobilize? It was the way home that left us with a definite, all the wider margin in materials to use for emergencies.

It was a revolutionary process that I had thought of.

"Leave it all to us!" "Then it's sooo easy!" "Simple!"

The fairies, having heard the request, hooked onto the tether and descended... then, several hours later, this was the scene that was unfolding before our eyes.

"This is sort of a space cat's cradle."

O-taro-kun looked disheartened. He hated it whenever things proceeded as they were now.

"A space cat's cradle, that is an accurate way of expressing it."

What laid there before our very eyes, built weaving around the stronger and more reliable tethers, was a spiral staircase.

Though that sounded fake, it was there, so there was no way around it. There was nothing else to do about this except to accept it as it was.

"I'll explain. First, please connect yourselves to the tether using this hook. This will be your lifeline. Please don't forget to lock yourselves in, because if you fall, you will die."

"And then?," went Y.

"And then we descend the staircase."

"And then?"

"That is all."

"...excuse me, but we are thirty-six thousand kilometers above sea level, right? How much time is it going to take to descend all the way to ground level...?," went K-san.

"Squad leader, the circumference of the Earth is approximately forty thousand kilometers. We can say that it's a bit better when compared to that, can we!"

P-ko-san was nonchalant. The duo of ex-spaceships had no sense of danger.

And that, well, was due to how it was probable that they would not die even in the worst case scenario of a fall.

"What I mean is that it's gonna take a year!"

Y was making a scene. It was her natural right, but I stood in the way and added an explanation.

"A Climber with material on it is sitting in wait partway through. There are had also been several supply points set up from the beginning. There are areas in which we can take a shortcut via Climbers, though this is limited to areas in which we can use it safely. We can also use the lodgings that have been set up in strategic places. That said, they are just hammocks."

It felt like everyone's eyes stared far away.

"There are few spots where the tether survives, see. Use them with maximal efficiency gives us this, the most plausible way home. So please be at ease. It will not take a year. According to calculations, using shortcuts well it will take a mere two months for us to arrive on land!"  
...two mooonths...

I did hear curses. But I ignored them.

"Come now, let us go! On to Earth! To the birthplace we miss so dearly!"

"...I wish I hadn't come to save you."

With a gait like their ghost was showing, we all descended the unstable staircase that tied the tether together.

That said, if we ignored the safety factor, there were in fact other and somewhat easier ways, you see. For me at present, those were sort of unchoosable choices.

I also set my feet on the staircase. Though a cat's cradle, it was built quite firmly. It would absorb impacts, and, reduced shaking by thinking by itself. That was also because the magic of the proto-fairies was present in the tether itself.

Turning back one last time, I looked up at the moon.

Grandfather, see you, goodbye.

"Mh-hm. Be well. Earth's waiting for you. Make it a fun and interesting place."

Yes indeed, we will put everyone's strength together and do so.

Grandfather's soul left me.

Feeling now lighter because of that, I felt somewhat cheerful, and I took my first step on the staircase headed for Earth.

"...mh."

It seemed that I had nodded to sleep while sitting on the chair.

The pleasant Summer wind seemed to occasionally carried drowsiness with it, and several

times I had been careless enough to be taken away by it.

This window seat far in the back was quite convenient.

The room that became the new Office of Mediation was on the third floor of a brand-new building, and, aside of how the spot was chosen to be somewhat distant from the Village, it was wide and pleasant to be in, and was blessed with both passage of wind and being hit by sunlight, it was in an excellent location.

Where I was sitting was called a special seat, one with its back to the window.

"Mornin'." "Good morning."

The door opened without fuss and Y and K-san, my friends as well as employees, unexpectedly showed up.

"Good morning to the both of you."

"There were commissions in the mail, two of 'em."

"What are they about?"

"One is about the moving problems. Their old family is stubborn, and doesn't seem to like the idea of moving away from the ruins they used to live in," went K-san.

Older folks were unwilling to leave the place where they were living.

As I considered possible ways of dealing with this I asked about the other one, and Y's face scrunched up slightly.

"...it's an annoying one. That sheep we used to have is revolting alongside the rest of the flock."

"Huh?"

"That's what's written. The sheep have turned the grazing land into a lawless area, hitting back on the sheep wranglers, and claimed responsibility for it. It's just that the sheet claiming responsibility is made of stampeding hooves and no one can read it."

I might have an idea about who it was, or maybe not.

The door opened again.

"Nee-san, good morning."

"Good morning, Assistant-san."

"Sorry for bringing this up out of nowhere, but we have something of a problem. There have been tense arguments on the matter of the apportioning of the land of the new Village. I tried to intervene a little, but, well, it was about deeply-rooted connections between people. The mayor dodged this saying it was our jurisdiction..."

"Uuh-huh... it sounds like subdivision of the land and seat-taking will not go away without arguments, is that not so."

These days, Assistant-san seems to have gotten much more used to life in the Village, and every day he runs about it corner to corner, doing all he can. He was the most reliable person in our Office.

Truly, that was what growing up was all about.

The door slammed open for the third time.

Treated like this, it was not going to be long before the door broke. That despite this being a new building.

"Onee-san, this is an important matter! When disassembling a destroyed house, a mass of hamsters burst out from beneath the earth, sending the Village in a state of panic..."

A young man and a young lady hopped up and jutted their faces in from the windowsill. As a reminder, this was the third floor.

"Guarding the gate's a fight with boredom, huh... we're fully powered now, but all we do is waste our time doing nothing but standing around. You wouldn't have some kind of job,

wouldn't you?"

"I want to fight! Are there no enemies in this village! I ache for justice!"

This was how things went of late.

"Everybody, please calm down. Since it seems there are many problem, I will cancel the planned conference and split up in obvious..."

And as I was saying that, the door slammed open again...

"Mediator-sensei! Our wind turbine has flown off!"

"We got a whopper of a problem! This book has been in our personal library, handed over generation to generation, but when my mother opened it, she was sucked right in! There's some kind of city inside the book, and it looks like there are people living in it..."

"Yooo, sensei!" "Good morning, sensei." "Sensei, teach me how to study!"

This felt like a bustle that we could not merely split up and deal with.

"...it might be better to remove the door at some point," went K-san.

"Maybe."

Y made a prankish smile.

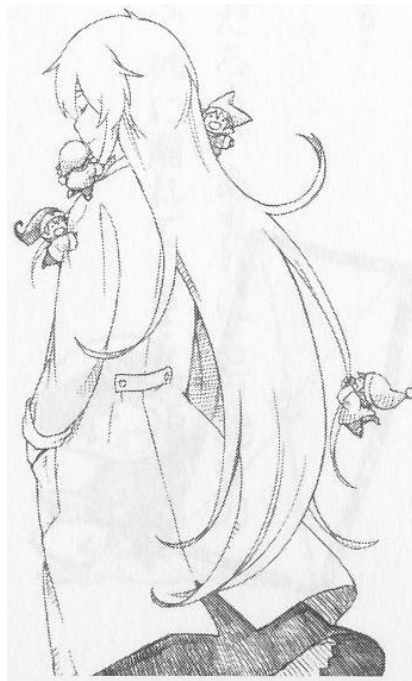
"So, what are you gonna do, boss?"

Every gaze converged on me.

I was not about to panic. At times like these, it was going to be a big troubling mess no matter what I tried.

And since it was going to be a mess regardless, so long as I calmed down and handled everything in order... well, at some point I will have solved everything. Someday, that is.

I stood up from the chair that ought have been occupied by Grandfather, took a white robe, and wore it by the sleeves. I withdrew PocMon from the base from which she was charging, and plush-like fairies hopped one after another up on my shoulders, trying not to miss the ride.



"Some case?" "Some problem?" "Some coverup? Up?"

"Is there now."

I giggled and walked on. I had not decided where I was headed. But I had the feeling that, wherever I went, it would be all right.

After all, humanity had met with a gradual decline, and for some centuries now. Earth was now the property of the Fairies.

The future was waiting for us.

## Letter from an unknown sender



It's me. You doing well?

Is everything in order with the job? Even if it doesn't go well in the beginning, I know the new position of chief will make you grow. Like it did me back when I was in your place.

Right now, I'm spending all my time researching how far humanity's sphere of influence extends within the solar system.

It's a job worth doing. I believe that this will be of use when other people follow us out here, someday. After all, being within the sphere and outside it means a very different difficulty level.

That said, right now we're powerless. Though we can move and think, we can't make so much as a needle move. We're something of a purely mathematical power right now.

When I think that even just a single human could survive to be with us, all the inconveniences disappear and it's just fun. Once in a while we meet with a living machine, and when we do we can borrow their powers. We have our fill of the intellectual sciences.

I took pen in hand today urged by the need to give you one piece of advice.

I believe that this voyage has led you to an important truth. I believe you know exactly who you are.

I suspect it's possible that you could share this truth with everyone else.

And I want to say that that will take careful analysis.

Our gazes, once in the darkness, have seen the light. We were attracted by the garden in which light shines, and that became our goal. Had humanity continued thriving, we would never have been able to resist it. But humanity truly declined at the time of the Great Discontinuity. Consequently, there was space for something to slip into that performance-based hierarchy.

What did we lose?

I think that what we lost was falling in love.

It's likely that, in the short term, we rose to prominence, we mingled, and had children. We did our best and managed to imitate everything, including that way of doing things in life. It was a tenacious love that created that.

However, now that the wish had been fulfilled, we're mistaking what we are. Meaning that the feeling of love has vanished. Our origins likely wouldn't have changed, so while we did have it when we were children, we lost it as we grew up. A specialization called 'maturity' happened.

One part was us, one part tied us to the calculative behavior of our surroundings. You



understand, at this point, what the latter wants, right?

There really shouldn't have been all this bustle about you being a replaced child. :-)

An extremely peculiar interaction: if there's a definition of 'magic', this would be it. It's an all too strong power, but it won't quite fit into human hearts. As long as one remains a person, it will leak out. Being an interaction, it would tie to gravity, electricity, and many others.

Phenomenons that can't be explained happen, in the end, because of this.

These special interactions have the function of storage area, this I believe you've already seen. They are preserved in permanence, held between our racial memories like a specimen is held between slices of glass when ready to be put under a microscope.

The fairies, the personification of all hearts, had read through to the whole thing at the time of their appearance, and that's what it all means.

This got long, but here's my opinion.

It's possible that, once we know, we won't be able to keep things up as we are now.

Our world at present is being formed with a misperception to it.

As long as we don't know, our hearts will continue spurting out what can't fit within them, and we will continue to elevate a number of things as the definition of life. I believe that will enrich the world going forwards, and make it fun and interesting. I believe in the violence of diversity.

What about you?

I'll leave to you whether to reveal it or keep it away.

I believe I'll let my pen go at this.

As long as there aren't big stumbles, what awaits us next are incredible developments!

And once they arrive, the job of Mediator will be especially important.

Proceed with heart.

PS: there's a thing I'd like to ask you regarding Courtney-kun. It's about my gun collection, don't dispose of it but give it Joshua Courtney. I've promised him that.

PPS: while I've been incendiary in the past, you of course should respect the wills of every person.

PPPS: I leave the ways through which I've written to you in my own handwriting as homework. You can find something if you search, right? Should you be able to figure it out, I'd be happy if you wrote a reply. For those working far away from home, you see, there's nothing as encouraging as getting a letter from family. Also, in case something of a great-granddaughter is born, make sure to attach a photo. Be well now.

## Afterword

As over a year has passed since the release of Volume 8, I think we're close to going back to being strangers. Greetings, I'm Tanaka Romeo.

Originally one book, the plot became split into a first and second volume, with the first part being volume 8, and the second part being this here volume 9.

Volume 8 was released in February '13. And volume 9 was out June '14.

...they're too far apart. Too much of an eternity has passed. It's shocking, if I say so myself, that there's been a gap this wide. Of course, at that point I couldn't think of something as masochistic as someone putting a clock that passed one minute every three on my back as a prank (though I did think of it).

What? There's Yoshiki-sensei for one who's worse than me, so it's fine?

Uhm... senpai. I don't want to catch anyone's eyes in Yoshiki-sensei's classroom, I might certainly have the same last name of Tanaka, but I definitely don't want to be used as an example, thank you so much. I want to live in peace like a caterpillar under a rock. It's cold and pleasant down there.

Well, still, I somehow managed to finish writing this, so I'm exceedingly relieved.

I'm easily embarrassed, so I believe it better that I explain this quickly. Thank you so much for your support through this lengthy endeavor. It's certain that a nine volume light novel isn't particularly long, but I'm happy from my heart that I managed to write more or less the full series that I'd been working on from the beginning. Truly, thank you all very much.

Humanity Has Declined is with this complete, is more or less what I'd like to say.

The reason I'm ambiguous is that there's the possibility that after this I'll be publishing a collection of short stories.

*"Why, you, short stories... then this ninth ain't the last damn volume, innit! What superciliosity to bring it up so forcibly! Well?"*

Tanaka here also thinks the very same.

Given it's you, senpais, you will of course know about Slayers. So there's no problem if you think its short story collection as something of a 'Slayers Special'.

If I may make a videogame-style comparison, then this comes after the main campaign has ended, that's how I'd like you to think about that.

As for what kind of stories, for now we're in talks with the editing department.

Reprinting bonus novelettes is fine, but making them bespoke is also fine. I know that there's definitely controversy in reprinting bonuses. I'm afraid. With that included, I sit scared of the response of the 'net as we think about the decision. If you have an opinion, just toss it on the Internet. I'll find it when I look up myself.

Right now it feels like one volume will be released. What happens next depends on the economics, of course.

I'd be happy myself, too, if you'd check it out following this. I expect the resulting book will be a fairly pleasant concept that fulfills my original intent.

Let's write about recent events. Of late, I was finally able to write the ninth volume of Jintai, you know~.

...that's not what this's about, you makin' fun of me or something? Customers're gonna revolt, yanno,

that's what you'd be saying. What I think is that writing about recent events in an afterword is limited to those who manage to get to the end without struggles. Finishing two books at a time = recent events, you see. There's two types of people when it comes to authors: those who write slowly and the rest. What? That's Yoshiki-sensei, I'm not saying a word about him. Please stop forcibly comparing us if-you-please. Awww, when I was young I really loved *The Heroic Legend of Arslan*...

Now then, with the Jintai series written, I received some uncommon fan letters. At present there's Twitter and all that, so it feels like the distance between reader and writer has shrunk, but Tanaka is afraid of the darkness of the 'net so he isn't on any of that. Regardless, I find myself very much humbled by this and express my deepest thanks.

Also, in those letters the question "*is there any trick to writing?*" appears several times. This being a good chance, I want to answer it.

The hardest part of writing a novel is thought to be the conclusion.

Contrary to that, building character and setting isn't that difficult... but what I'd like to say is that writing is fun. A work's most famous scenes also happen when having fun writing. Those are the climactic scenes where things really boil over. There are also many tiny tricks to making a famous scenes, but that topic would take a long time, so please make sure to examine many different works when researching this.

If you decide the climax from the beginning, what's in between will be more or less clear, and even if it's not clear, it will become easier to think about. Difficulty will be one step lower. Be nicer if your title had a meaning, then you can think about these things together even better. Even if, as a test, you need to skip a part you can't figure out, you'll figure it out by the end, and everything will be easier. That's all those things together. Do please try it.

By the way, my personal preferred scene of *The Heroic Legend of Arslan* is when the bag of gold coins gets lifted from the carriage's wheels. Don't cry, all right.

If I could easily write scenes like that, I'd have no problem feeding myself ever, I think.

And with all that said, may we meet again if the occasion takes us. Be well!

*This is an unofficial fan translation. Please support any official release.*